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John B. Chethimattam

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Dialogue and Community Building

Edited by
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Editorial

Two principal challenges to religion today are secularization and privatization. Secularization attempts to explain the world and human life in and by themselves and thereby deny all transcendence. This condemns man to the narrow confines of his terrestrial existence, the main source of his bondage of suffering and ignorance. Equally pernicious is privatization of religion making it solely a matter between the individual and his deity, with no relevance of that relationship to the social nature of human beings.

Religion is, however, radically opposed to selfish individualism. Amos, the Old Testament prophet, reminds the leaders of the Jewish people that Yahweh is God also of the Egyptians, the Cretans and other peoples, and, in the New Testament, Peter who was very reluctant to go to a gentile's house, realizes with a shock that God is not an acceptor of persons and that all who seek him in good faith are acceptable to him. In John's Gospel Jesus tells the Samaritan woman that God is spirit, that his concern is not restricted to Jerusalem or Mount Garisim and that he is available to all who seek him in spirit and truth. Faith is God's free gift to all human beings, and religions only endeavour to interpret this faith and make it relevant to the psychological, social, cultural and political coordinates of human existence. So every religion, though radically different in outlook, approach and ideology from others, claims to be relevant for all human beings. A basic factor, therefore, of interreligious dialogue is the community-building dynamics of religions. This is the common topic of the articles in this issue of *Jeevadharma*. The topic has actual relevance to the present day context in the aftermath of the destruction of the Babri masjid by Hindu fanatics and the communal violence in India and abroad.

My introductory article explores the religious dynamics of social harmony. William R. Burrows, Managing Editor of Orbis Books, shows that a truly worshiping community has to be fully involved with life and all fellow human beings. John W. Healy, a theologian and Vice-President for Planning of Fordham University, New York, takes his own personal pilgrimage as an example to show how interaction with people of other faiths leads to a strengthening of one's own faith and the building up of the community. Mervyn Ananda of the politics department of the Peradeniya University of Sri Lanka study the religious history of Ceylon as a test-case. When the European colonial powers came and imposed their socio-political structure on a people nurtured for long centuries on Buddhist dharma, they destroyed the social and political harmony as well. Only by an ongoing dialogue by the different religions of a nation can there be political harmony and all round progress of the people.

John B. Chethimattam

The Reaching-Up or Worship-Oriented Church

Historical Jesus was profoundly suspicious of organized worship. But the priestly structure and liturgy of the Catholic Church is constructed more along the lines of Roman imperial court ceremonies than the worship fellowship of Jesus and his disciples. Worship exists to promote a new vision of reality and is valid to that extent. The most important worship is full involvement in the living community, its joys, sorrows, hopes, fears, accomplishments and failures.

I. The Irony of Speaking of "Liturgy" and "Following Christ" in one Breath

The topic is not without its ironies, perhaps even paradoxes. On the one hand, there is the Vatican Council II Decree on Worship that says that worship (liturgy) is "rightly seen as an exercise of the priestly office of Jesus Christ" (art 7) and also, "the liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the church is directed; it is also the fount from which all her power flows" (art 9).

Yet, if I read correctly trends in scriptural research on the historical Jesus and the earliest community, Jesus was profoundly suspicious of worship organized around the Temple and priesthood. Indeed, in John Dominic Crossan's monumental *The Historical Jesus: Life of a Mediterranean Peasant* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1991), Jesus is best understood as one who presented an ideal of God-human relations as a "brokerless kingdom". (And in so doing, he alienated the priestly establishment, as well as cast profound doubts on the validity of much subsequent sacerdotalizing of Christianity in Catholicism).

The depth of that insight is made more apparent and relevant when one reads a second monumental book, Elizabeth

Schuessler Fiorenza's *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983). In her view, of which I am convinced, the historical Jesus initiated a community wherein men and women were equals, going quite against the grain of Mediterranean cultural values. Subsequently, according to her to make peace with culture, women were made to obey Greco-Roman, Mediterranean patriarchal rules and that accommodation was written into the received text of the New Testament.

If one follows both authors' reconstructions of Jesus, respectively as a "woman-identified man", the bearer of *sophia* (a feminine, wisdom dimension of the divine), and as one who overturned every notion of prestige and honor—bedrock of both Jewish and Roman cultural values—it is hard to reconcile the Jesus of history with the emergence of an elaborate priestly construct of the Christian essence. And make no mistake about it—the priestly structure and liturgy of the Catholic Church are constructed more along lines of Roman imperial court ceremonies than the ministry of an itinerant 1st Century Jewish "magician".

This, then, is the irony of speaking of liturgical worship and Christian discipleship in the same breath, and unless one keeps together this ironic juxtaposition of the apparently irreconcilable, one will miss the point of what follows.

What I want to do this evening is to square the circle created by the irony, even paradox, involved in my contention that the iconoclastic founder of Christianity revealed in historical Jesus research today can be mediated or well served by a worship-oriented community. Hold on. It could be a bumpy ride. I am, though, going to make it a bit easier on myself and you by not attempting to deal with 1,400 years of liturgical tradition, except to say the following: Christianity is a religion that has to translate itself in new cultural situations in order to let the Spirit of Jesus live; there is an incompleteness to each of those translations that is well-served by the Italian adage, *traduttore, traditore* ("the translator is a traitor"). But Christianity is about the way each generation lets Jesus as Christ live in and through its life, not as an exercise wherein one copies the life and work of Jesus slavishly.

The question for us, then, is: *How does a community's worship serve the encounter with and transformation by Jesus the Christ?* To discuss this and to respond to the question of church as a "reaching-up" community, I must give a brief sketch of how the best and most adequate contemporary theology envisages church membership, discipleship, and Christian engagement with the "world".

II. A Contemporary Shift in Envisioning Church and World

For many centuries, Christians viewed church membership, discipleship, and engagement in the "world" in a two-level picture.

To make sense of the challenge of Jesus in a world that saw the earth below and heaven above, church was viewed as a bridge between a world of contingency, temporality, change, death, and sickness, on the one hand, and heaven, on the other hand. In this vision, Jesus came to overcome — through his death and resurrection — the closure of the ladder between heaven and earth and to teach us what we needed to know to take advantage of his redemptive work. And God was envisioned as the unmoved, eternal mover, the creator over and above the world, related to us primarily by sending the Son and the Spirit.

With the dawn of the modern world, something major changed. There was no plausible division between an upper and lower world. For those intellectuals who did not abandon faith altogether, Time and Eternity were seen as involved with one another — or Eternity was mere fantasy. The role of the church became blurred, because transcendence was not credible when viewed in terms of an up/down dichotomy. The very wording of the topic of our discussion seen in that light, is problematic; for "reaching up" is precisely what many people believe is wrong with much of old-fashioned religion; for it is said to force Christians to take their eyes off the misery and problems of the one world we all inhabit.

In my own view, transcendence in the spiritual life is better imaged as "reaching in" to depths *within* a single, overarching life process that we humans are privileged to join at birth. The role of the church is to create disciples of Jesus who

incarnate and actualize what he reveals to be the inner dynamics or secret of existence: *that is to say, God is the source of life and its meaning; a loving parent who reaches out to us in our confusion and darkness; and one who offers us healing and fullness of life even as we attempt to heal and bring to completion the unfinished world we live in.*

A worshiping community, in the context, is a gathering of persons in fellowship who seek to have their consciousness raised by the surprising Spirit of Jesus; they seek to touch God, Jesus, and Spirit in one another, and to be pulled to the ultimate in worship: *that is to say, to stand, kneel, sit, sing, listen to the mystery of the fullness and surprise of life as one who follows this Jesus of Nazareth, finding God in the everyday world, letting the Spirit of this Jesus transform them "in their inward nature" (2 Cor 4:16) so that they have the "eyes of [their] hearts enlightened" (Eph 1:18) and thus feel in their depths the wonders of life.*

Returning for a moment to the picture of Jesus proffered by C and S-F, and attempting to connect that to the nature of church as a worshiping community, what I want to suggest is that contact with the historical Jesus was a liberating contact. It was an encounter that in the 1st century led men and women to discern a world in which human beings were radically equal because they were God's children, and one in which the very constitution of the world was revealed to rest in the feminine wisdom of a nurturing God; and also to be judged by a just God. Echoes of that kind of encounter and the sense of newness it conferred are to be found yet in the famous Pauline passage: "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28).

Worship exists to promote that new vision of reality and to celebrate it. I would go further to add a criterion of validity: Liturgy is authentic to the extent that, on the one hand, it *reinforces* it, and, on the other hand, it *reflects* it. It is an opinion that gathers strength the more I think about it, that unless you bring to worship a heart that knows God in the world of family, community, work, culture, and creation, you will probably not meet God in worship.

The Jesus who was so suspicious of public displays of prayer that he told people to go to private places to pray (Matthew 6:5-8) still lives and still teaches that God has no need of our liturgies. Liturgies, then, are justified because we need them, but not for any other reason.

III. Things "Ontologically" Prior to Public Worship

An author I have spoken with frequently over recent months about a book he has edited for Orbis on pastoral counselling sent me a cassette that is keyed to a book I highly recommend to everyone. The author is Robert Wicks, the book *Touching the Holy: Ordinariness, Self-Esteem, and Friendship* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria, 1992). The point of Bob's book on touching the holy is that God is met in the ordinary or God will not be met. If we are not aware that God's primary gift to us is the ordinary, we miss the point of Christian life.

Bob tells of a daydream he had wherein that truth came home to him. I'd like to quote his book's rendition of the dream. In it Wicks imagines himself reporting to God in heaven, asking forgiveness for his many sins, and finding God is not very interested in his confession:

"You misunderstand. There's no need for all your excuses. I am not angry with you."

I answered with a note of curiosity in my voice: "You're not?"

"No, but I am a little surprised and puzzled... You see, I remember the exact moment when you were born. It was exciting! In the heavens, we got a thrill out of your creation. We were pleased. And so, the question I have for you now is: why haven't you taken more time during your life to stand in wonder, awe, and gratitude for my presence within you?"

Even in my daydreams I am very defensive, so I responded: "Lord, I guess, I did not want to be guilty of the sin of narcissism."

To this God responded: "When you are out on a hot sunny day and you feel a wonderfully cool breeze, do you enjoy it?"

"Why, yes".

"Can you control it?"

"No."

"Are you the source of it?"

"Is it your breeze?"

"Now, do you see what I mean?" (p 24)

The point of Christian life is summed up by Jesus in saying, "The Kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21). Being guilt-ridden, enjoying "success", being "active in the parish", having the "right kind of political and social connections", and so forth are not what Christian life is about. Rather, it is a matter of being a self in the presence of a loving God, according to Wicks.

Too much talk in the church, I fear, loses sight of that home truth... and that is why I think it important to *speak of things ontologically prior to public worship*. Ideally, there are, I believe, at least three layers of prayer that are prior to public worship... and without them no church's worship will have the life and transforming power good worship can have.

Another piece of background. Thomas Aquinas says somewhere that the point of prayer is not to tell God what we need. God already knows that. Prayer is important because we need it and God uses our prayer to transform us.

Let's take a run at the three layers of prayer prior to and upon which a meaningful parish community liturgical life depends. Realize, too, that although I put these and worship in the parish in 1, 2, 3, 4 order, all occur in a continuous circle. Liturgy may, indeed, be the point of entrée for one person. A cool breeze for another. Direct inspiration from God for another. Friendship for another. But to speak of "public liturgy" at the fourth level without realizing the ontological priority of the others is to forget the sacrament of the ordinary. Liturgy celebrates and intensifies our awareness of the *meaning* of the ordinary; it does not substitute for it.

1. Personal prayer ... time spent by oneself getting free of the things that preoccupy us and keep us from enjoying the ordinary. It used to be that this sort of prayer was thought to be for monks, priests, sisters — professional religious. No

more. To live as a Christian in today's world, one needs time to get one's head straight or our culture's noise will overcome your ability to hear life's inner rhythms where God speaks.

2. Family prayer... time spent with one's spouse and loved ones, putting that life together in the context of faith, arranging priorities and struggling with the demands of faith, even as one tries to enjoy life's gifts. This is perhaps the most neglected form of liturgy today. Most of us will finally seek time alone when the world gets to be too much. But the old liturgy of families praying together at meals, on waking or going off to the day's work, at day's end are just about gone.
3. Small community prayer. There was a day not too many years ago when people spoke of the need for small communities within the parish as a sort of oasis, a larger home in a heartless world. As the literature matured and reflected on ways the small-group or house-church movement had gone wrong, there came an awareness that self-selected communities presented real dangers. They often attracted needy people who wanted to bask in the glow of fellow enlightened ones. I am, then, fully aware of the dangers of zealotry and self-satisfied mutual naval-gazing. Still, it seems to me that the primary model of church ought to be such small (some call them "intentional") communities. Groups small enough to meet for prayer, to read the scriptures and reflect on them and to celebrate the eucharist together. Today's parish in urban and suburban America is larger than most dioceses in the early church. Yet because of ordination politics and the resultant monopolization of "priestly power" by a celibate clergy, both pastors and their people are today forced to make believe that a huge conglomeration of people is the primary church community.

In the vision of a reaching up community I am struggling to define, we need to get clear what church is for—bringing people into contact with the transforming person of Jesus in and through God's Spirit, and midwifing an empowered "going into the world" by Christians with a sense of mission. And in

a world where worship as "reaching up" is a less than fruitful image of what one does in prayer, perhaps the image of a group celebrating what they find when they "reach into the depths of existence" is more apt.

So the prime requisite for a truly *Christian* worshipping community is realization that the most important worship is the one offered by a fully aware disciple who is engaged fully with life. If I am not in vital contact with my wife... If I wear emotional scales that keep me from sharing with my children... If I am only half-present to my work place, merely "getting by there" without feeling the issues at play in my coworkers' lives... then the liturgy of my lifework (and liturgy means "work of the people") is shallow and time spent in church will probably be flat and meaningless. Optimally, though, to the extent that I grow in Christian life, my deficiencies at home, on the job, or in the community are recognized as areas for repentance and growth.

Yet despite that truth, much liturgical renewal since the Second Vatican Council has been about church ceremonies and getting the laity into the sanctuary. In so doing, the most active "lay" persons in parishes have become veritable lay "clerics". What was needed, instead, was an envisagement of forms of fellowship that would realize ordained ministries as subordinate to the needs of "ordinary" Christian life "in the world".

A truly meaningful worship in community occurs when persons bring the joys, sorrows, hopes, fears, accomplishments, and failures of their "life's work" and lift them up to God. One of the most meaningful prayers of my youth was the so-called "Morning Offering". *Oh Jesus, through the immaculate heart of Mary, I offer you my prayers, works, joys, and sufferings of this day,* it started, and as it continued, one linked oneself with the joys and sufferings of the entire world as they were united in the sacramental worship of the church. I sometimes wonder if I knew what I was saying, but as antiquated as some of the sentiments and words of that prayer are, it is a wonderful prayer.

Where that prayer perhaps went astray was in its churchiness. It was centered on a church that envisaged itself primarily as a means for getting Catholics to heaven and not as

a community of disciples struggling to live life individually and corporately in a way that was worth of their solidarity with all of life. But what we seem to lack today are ways to reinforce the kind of life of prayer that will help us deepen our feeling for the divine depths of ordinary life.

I was on the phone recently with an African friend from Gambia. He is a convert to Christianity from Islam and professor now at a prestigious Ivy League divinity school. He is a brilliant man and a sage in the truest sense of that word. One of the central points in his writings is a critique of the way in which Western culture has overwhelmed the religious dimension that should permeate all of life, becoming so powerful that one can scarcely escape it. From reading and talking with this friend, I've come to be aware that if one is well-educated and properly "liberal" (in the classic sense of that word, not in the modern American political sense)—freed from old and oppressive social and religious conventions (!)—chances are also that secularism has come to dominate one's liberalism. What both political "liberals" and "conservatives" seem insufficiently aware of—even when they use religious language (as diversely as Jerry Falwell and Joan Campbell, for instance, use the same words), secularized liberal culture appears to loom larger than Christian dynamics. The irony is that, instead of a liberationist liberalism encouraging us to enjoy the space to exercise one's soaring spirit, secularistic liberalism restricts its scope. The result is that little value is accorded prayer as anything but a private moment or time spent in the "church of one's choice".

I told my Gambian friend that I was preparing a talk for Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish, and that it was forcing me to examine my own conscience. He laughed. That very day he had confessed to his students that after two decades of talking as an African about the "Western" relegation of religion to the private peripheries of life, he realized that it was happening in his own life.

I want to move on to my fourth point. But I feel a bit like a New Guinea bush pilot trying to find a mountain jungle airstrip when the ground is covered by fog. I want to draw things together and open the floor for discussion. But perhaps I should not even try to smooth the transition. It may be enough

to say that there *is* fog keeping us from viewing as a single totality, our private lives, the life of the communities called 'church', and our public space.

IV. Summing Up: Parish as a Reaching-up Community

If you follow me in envisioning Christianity as a movement of men and women who allow themselves to be transformed in their inner beings by God, Jesus, and Spirit — and by one another — and who attempt to actualize lives consonant with God being the ground of their being, then we are three-quarters of the way toward knowing what it means to be a reaching up community.

Christians are spread geographically all over the landscape. But the *geographical spread* is minor in comparison with their *internal appropriational spread*. My friend the Maryknoller John Walsh describes six levels of faith development in his book *Evangelization and Justice: New Insights for Christian Ministry* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1982). I will not go into each of those steps except to say that we move from baby steps to adulthood as we grow in the capacity to see all of life in an integrated fashion through the eyes of faith. How one worships depends upon where one is in that faith appropriation spread.

Then there are the four integrally related, aspects integral to a worshipping community. The first occurs when individuals go into private places to sit and listen to the Spirit. The second occurs in interaction with one's inner circle — spouse, family, intimates, who are the warp and woof of our life. At a third level — I borrow the words of Bob Wicks and put them in a different context — we as part of a basic Christian community where we become prophets, cheerleaders, hasslers, and intimate guides to one another.

At a fourth level, and this is where I see the "parish" fitting in, there is need for a community of communities meeting periodically to enjoy the catholicity that comes only when people — diverse in race, economic status, political persuasions, and so forth — join to celebrate their unity in Christ. This will work only if — despite all else that divides them — they discover at times like Christmas, Easter, Pentecost, and confirmation a deeper

unity wherein the challenge they are to one another meets a deeper form of unity in God. Whites are challenges to African Americans, just as Africans are challenges to Asians, the poor to the rich, the clever to the slow, the able-bodied to the handicapped, men to women, straights to gays, and children to parents. The point I want to make, though, is that catholic church is one in which these challenges are faced and deeper unities discovered and celebrated.

A pipedream? Perhaps. But it is also Catholicism at its best. If we can find a way to suppress sacerdotalism and let ordained ministry become what it was in an Augustine of Hippo and sometimes still is in figures such as an Evaristo of Sao Paolo—a point of unity and discernment for large groups of diverse individuals united in Christ—then worship will not be antithetical to the Jesus of Nazareth who broke through the cultural bonds of his own era to reveal an unbrokered kingdom imaged in open fellowship around a table where nothing counted but being a child of God.

Church is not a social service agency or the "right" kind of political party at prayer. Rather it is a community of people gripped by Jesus the Christ in the Spirit, discovering and celebrating the divine depths of creation and redemption in ordinary life. The community that is thus linked, I am convinced, will inevitably produce persons with a sense of mission and who will produce profound social results... but foundational to it all is the experience of going down into the depths of existence with a Jesus who embraced death rather than having it thrust upon him. That sort of profound consciousness of union with the Christ is the foundation of a church that worships in spirit and in truth, not merely according to liturgical rules.

William R. Burrows

Religious Dynamics of Social Harmony in South Asia*

In the context of the present communal riots and interreligious disharmony in India and in several parts of the world the article examines the religious roots of social and political harmony. All religions believe in one God and religious faith is God's gift to all his children. If religions attended to their own genuine spirit, fidelity to each religion's identity and unique tradition will lead to an appreciation of the faith of other peoples as dimensions of one's own faith.

Some sixty years ago Sigmund Freud confidently predicted: "Civilization has little to fear from educated people and brain-workers. In them the replacement of religious motives for civilized behaviour by other, secular motives would proceed unobtrusively". Recent events in several parts of the world and South Asia, particularly in India show how wrong Freud was in his optimism regarding human civilization. Our eyes have been badly hurt by the falling rubble at the destruction of the Muslim mosque at Ayodhya and the blood bath that followed, our ears deafened by the Bomb blasts at Bombay, and the soul of humanity tainted by the blood of innocents that flowed freely under the pretext of ethnic cleansing in several parts of the globe while the rest of the world watched helplessly. In a land which since its political independence almost half a century ago hid behind the self-delusory slogans of "Non-Violence", "panchashila" and "universal religion" these shocking events call for a re-examination of the dynamics of social harmony that were taken for granted.

* The substance of this paper was presented as a talk to the Association of the Indian Academics of America, New York on July 18, 1993. Rejoinder to it by Dr. R. Kulkarni and response to the same are given in the Discussion Forum.

But as Steven R. Weisman, an editor of international news at the New York Times has recently stated in an article, the nationalist movements and rebellions in India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, have today spread to the whole world, "and today it is the whole world that is on fire with ethnic conflict". So India's experience remains important to the hopes and anxieties of the world, because it is struggling everyday with an ideal, the ideal of national unity, secularism, pluralism and democracy. (Business India, 15th anniv. issue, p. 235). The merit of India in this respect, according to A. M. Rosenthal of the New York Times, is that India has struggled with this ideal without falling into despondency and ceding to despotism.

I. The Socio-Political Paradigms

Ever since the nations of South Asia along with several peoples of Asia and Africa wrested their independence from the Colonial powers, the development of nation states has been periodically cast into definite socio-political paradigms. India itself is a model of such changing models and patterns. Pandit Jawharlal Nehru encouraged by Laski and Cambridge and London School of Economics, in the first flush of independence opted for Socialism, centralized planning and emphasised on heavy industry, promising the dams and factories as temples of modern India. Indira Gandhi, his daughter while toning down the strident advocacy of socialism, sought success and salvation in centralized power going to the extreme of an infamous Emergency which tried to suppress dissent in the name of efficiency. Her crusade against poverty failed because as Chandrasekhar, later prime minister, stated, she did not understand poverty, and because no one can eliminate poverty unless one experiences it first. When the democratic process threw Indira Gandhi out of power, the Janata Government which replaced the Congress tried to experiment with a divergent convergence of political ideologies. When it did not work there was again a resurgence of the nation's collective unconscious with new hopes and aspirations and a chastened Indira was brought back to power. When she was assassinated, Rajiv Gandhi, her reluctant heir, as well as V. P. Singh and Chandrasekhar who came after him, tried to jettison the baggage of the past and open the windows on a world vision.

Sri. Chandra Shekhar in a recent article, titled "Don't Brood over the Past", states: Until you can put the nation on the path of prosperity, you have to distribute poverty. Unless the labourer begins to believe that his children will enjoy the fruits of his labour, and that some rich man will not swallow up everything, he will lose interest in working... Nation building is a continuous process. These are moments in history which mould the future of a nation and there are people who are trying to assert themselves, not for themselves but for the better future of the people. Tomorrow could well bring about that change". (Business India, 15th anniv. issue, p. 33). Today Sri. Narasimha Rao the present Prime Minister, is continuing the same process with his politics of consensus, undaunted by the rampage of Hindutva, Muslim fundamentalism and the Sikh vision of Khalistan and other separatist attempts. As he himself states in an interview India's hope is in the tolerance of pluralism: "There have always been social and political forces that have questioned the legitimacy of the political system and sometimes resorted to violent means. Our polity has shown the resilience and flexibility to bring these movements into the socio-political mainstream. This is the strength of our democracy". (1. c. p. 72)

The constants in Indian community building

What has emerged as a constant in this half a century of struggle with communal forces and divisive tendencies is a certain philosophy of human social harmony. It is a detached attachment to the idea of a nation, the idea of an amorphous, variform, ever changing yet changeless, pluralistic yet singularly bound nation. It is a sense of something whole, of a larger entity much stronger than the sum of its parts. But it is not a monomaniacal pursuit of economic growth, which could only be at the cost of social justice and equitable distribution of wealth. One has, however, to recognize the emergence of a strong middleclass as the backbone of the nation and the guarantor of its civic values. This Middle Class advocated a workable marriage of decentralized growth with democracy, of growth with equity. A national effort was undertaken to see that the benefits of growth and wealth should accrue to all peoples. Jan Jack, now editor of The Independent on Sunday, who is a

seasoned observer of the Indian scene, reports how even an ordinary railway official in Bihar could disarm him by asking: "Do you know of a country which simultaneously enjoys rapid economic growth, greater social justice and a democratic government"? In that simple man's question lies the basis of hope for the whole South Asia today.

Hence, an important element of this philosophy of harmony which binds the glimmer of consensus is that change is a must. There is realization in the whole South Asia that the world cannot go on as in the past and that some radical change is necessary. This means that the economy has to be put back on a sustainable high growth path, as to provide everyone with a job, help garner the resources and upgrade the social services and ultimately eliminate poverty. Poverty is no longer considered an inevitable fate, but a man-caused disaster and hence a sin. The democratic principle of one man one vote, has brought greater confidence in people power and sent a message to the political parties that if those in power do not show results the people will throw them out. As the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci once said in another context: "The old is dying and the new cannot be born; in the interregnum a variety of morbid symptoms appear". But these morbid symptoms like the agonising and fragmenting homogenization, ethnic cleansing, ripping apart of cultural and geographical homelands, alienating sense of loss and helplessness, crime, communal passions, violence and riots are also ironically signs of a new birth. If a baby is silent for a long time there is something wrong with it; but if it is crying and wailing, it may be a sign that it is alive and well. This renaissance that appears in the actuality of South Asia derives in large measure from the power of plurality.

South Asia and the whole Orient do not follow a fundamentally unyielding world-view as of the West. Freud defined this Western *Weltanschauung* as "an intellectual construction which solves all the problems of our existence uniformly on the basis of one overriding hypothesis, which, accordingly, leaves no question unanswered and in which everything that interests us finds its fixed place". On the other hand, the wondrous reality of the East is a plethora of questions, a mosaic of tongues and eyes, the delightful absence of a fixed focus: a vision at

once pluralistic and all encompassing. The reason for this tolerance of diversity is the particular type of rationality followed by the people of the Orient as a whole. Instead of objectively analysing the world out there to reach a true assessment of its essence, the aim is to go out from an integral experience of reality and find its relevance and meaning in the diversity of human lives. Instead of restlessly searching for the needle in the haystack, one has to find pleasure and fulfilment in what already one is and one has. As Sankara the great Indian philosopher repeatedly stated, an end which can be attained or reached can also be tragically lost; what leads to real happiness is to realize that one is already in the final end to which one is constantly tending. Instead of looking for an outside agent to pull us out of the pit in which we imagine to be trapped in, people have to realize the fullness of the ground of being from which they emerge in an infinite variety of expressions.

Religious roots of social harmony

The ultimate roots of this harmony is religious. It is a religio-cultural outlook than any particular religion. The people of South Asia, Hindus, Buddhists, Jains, and even Muslims and Christians in their deep religiosity share a sort of aesthetic continuum. For them faith is not merely a creed, but bhakti, devotion. This devotional movement was participated in equally by Hindus, Christians and Muslims, so that some Muslim mystics were venerated as saints by followers of all religions. They do not explore the existence of God, asking what the divine reality is, as the Greeks did. They do not in Hebrew fashion look for a Creator of heaven and earth. For them religion is refuge, the reliance on the maternal principle, the divine lap, from which all things come forth and to which all return.

Hinduism, Christianity, Buddhism, Islam and other religions are a fact of the life of the Indian people. They are a source of rivalry, conflict and even religious wars only on account of sectarianism and communalism, factors outside religious faith, which make religion insensitive to the respublica, the public order that surrounds and includes people of all faiths. What we need is a public religion, which is a communion of communions, each of which lives in full fidelity to its authentic tradition and also at the same time is responsive to the call of faith common to

all believers. Public religion is a movement rather than an institution, a zone of concerns and values shared by all human beings. What unites the believers in this communion of communions is a desire to move religious faith away from a narrow concern with personal life and particular material interests which effectively undercuts the meaning of religion itself. They become symbiotes who pledge themselves each to the other, by explicit or tacit agreements as to mutual communication of whatever is useful and necessary for the harmonious exercise of social life with a religious motivation. This implies: 1) respect for the legitimate autonomy of other social institutions, accepting the value of secularization; 2) acceptance of some responsibility for the well being of the wider society; and 3) commitment to work with other social institutions in shaping the common good. One has to distinguish between secularism, which denies the transcendent, and is, therefore, a bad thing; and secularization which rightly recognizes the removal of many areas of social life, the arts, education, law, government, economic institutions and the like from the control of religious bodies. Public religion rejects also "privatization" of religion, which is a tendency to restrict religious faith to the category of the individual ruling out any engagement of religion with society.

Such an approach to religion avoids the conflicts between church and state, religion and politics that was the bane of the history of the West and even today creates insoluble problems in the Middle East, particularly in the Islamic world, where organized religion dominated the state: One religion was declared the state religion, and followers of other religions were reduced to second class citizens. Secularism is the political ideal in South Asia from time immemorial. Secularism is a concept linked to democracy and some degree of industrialization. It implies something more than mere neutrality towards all religions, nor acceptance of a co-existence of all religions. Secularism means that society has a right to exist on its own with its own inherent moral principles without direct dependence on any particular religion. Morality itself is not tied to belief in God or fear of punishment from a deity, but is based on a concern for the authenticity of human life and the well-being of society. Secularism requires that religion remains in the personal and private domain of individuals and free associations of individuals.

The establishment of a state religion, even if it is the religion of the majority of the population, will hurt the cause of human society and its harmonious working. A Christian state, a Hindu rashtra or a government based on the Qur'an will mean that all activity be subordinated to a single ideology. The argument that the followers of the particular religion constitute the permanent majority of the state and that those who rule represent the majority is not valid. For, in democratic functioning majorities are constituted anew on each major issue and those who constitute the majority may vary each time and are drawn from all ranges of identity—religious, social, economic and political. Hence the notion of a permanent majority defined by religion or any other ideology like Marxism is undemocratic and can be effective only if it is violent (see Romila Thapar, "Giving Secularism a Bad Name" 1. c. p. 55).

Religion and politics

Religion itself is not an ideology, but part of the political side of human life. Religion and morality if reduced to ideologies will have very little relevance for daily existence. In making decisions about life and practice one can have absolute certainty in very few things. As Aristotle stated in his Nichomachean ethics, in moral decisions one can reach only a moral certainty regarding the correctness of one's actions. Nor do religion and ethics have the clarity of mathematics or biology. But the passion for security and absolute certainty drives people to take refuge in fundamentalism and fanaticism by affirming the absolute validity of a sacred text or of a particular ritual and one's own understanding of the same. This absolutization of the trivial without any solid rational ground to rely on, has only one motive behind it, namely the power it brings. All types of fundamentalism like the Ku Klux Klan, cultism and Fascism add a religious fervor to the pursuit of power.

The emergence on India's political scene of BJP with the forces and cults aligned with it at the chaotic moment of the transition from a single dominant party democracy to a multi-party coalitional participatory system naturally follows the dynamics of the 11 years of Indira Gandhi's rule. Instead of looking for India's legitimate place in the midst of world politics Indira sought security in making India the leading power in South

Asia, a sort of hegemony and a fortress unto itself. It did not need the world, and the world could very well do without it. The BJP, RSS, VHP, Bajrang Dal and the mobilized sadhus and sants are taking refuge in the same isolationist Hindu nationalism in claiming to build a Hindu India, in which according to its proponents there will be "Hindu-Muslims", "Hindu-Christians" and "Hindu-Buddhists". Instead of moving ahead to conquer its legitimate place in the community of industrialized, democratic powers in a world freed from cold war, the sponsors of Hindutva are projecting a false image of India's spirit through myths, fantasies, legends and pseudo-scholarship.

But the irony of this new stand of Hindu nationalism is that it by itself is a denial of Hindutva as a cultural perspective. The basic understanding of Hindutva is that it starts with an inner realization of the One-without-a-second and is tolerant of all the different expressions of that ineffable experience. What unites all believers is faith. Yet that faith itself is conceived in radically divergent ways, and can assume highly objectionable forms like zealotry, bigotry, assertiveness and hardness of heart! Similarly, though "salvation" is the common concern of all religions, it can have bewildering conceptions according to the differing prepositions added to it as in, for, by, of, and from. As Kenneth Cragg notes the Philippian jailer's question in the Acts of the Apostles (16:30): "What must I do to be saved?" would by itself be for a Theravada Buddhist, actually setting up the individuality and its yearning from which he seeks to be liberated. (Internat. Bulletin of Missionary Research, 17 (1993) p. 2)

The trend today in some corners to imagine a world order of competing civilizations on the basis of religion as Christian, Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu and possibly African is purely fictional, ahistoric and often racist as well as xenophobic. Civilizations are not homogeneous entities, but composed of and divided by overlapping groups based on gender, class, region, language, ethnicity and religion. Religion is only one factor among these, and there are strong religious links between groups across civilizational categories. If we take Islam, for example, one would see that the more than one billion Muslims do not share a single history, language, culture or tradition. It is a complex religion that has over 1400 years taken on many political,

philosophical, theological and mystical forms in a number of countries with diverse groupings of people on the basis of class, ethnicity and experience. Hence to place all Muslims under the rubric of Islamic civilization is to iron out diversity and support the ideologies of fundamentalist groups bent on ethnic cleansing. Similarly labelling Chinas as Confucian is a distortion. Confucianism in its institutional, religious sense is not predominant in China, not to mention the influence of Confucianism in the Korean civilization.

II. Religious Identities and National Unity

The only possible approach to the situation of religious pluralism is to view faiths other than one's own as dimensions of one's own faith. As Emperor Asoka instructed his people in his Rock Edict XII, "The faiths of others all deserve to be honored for one reason or another. By honoring them, one exalts one's own faith and at the same time performs a service to the faith of others. By acting otherwise, one injures one's own faith and also does disservice to that of others. For if a man extols his own faith and disparages another because of devotion to his own and because he wants to glorify it, he seriously injures his own faith. Concord alone, therefore, is commendable, for through concord men may learn and respect the conception of Dharma accepted by others." This is the genuine Indian spirit. This means any religion or culture is by its very nature an inadequate expression of the inner experience from which it emerges. So no religion or culture is the exclusive prerogative of its adherents but the common property of all human beings. Jesus and Mohammed are equally the right heritage of Indians as Krishna and Sankara are. The moment an Indian opposes his Hindutva to the religious culture of Mohammed or Moses as something foreign and alien he denies the genuine universal spirit of South Asia.

Social harmony, however, is not created by a simple conformity to a monolithic pattern, everybody having the same goals, the same ideals, the same philosophy and the same pattern of religious organization. Society is not a monochrome fabric, but a highly artistic tapestry combining good many different patterns, each of which has its own integrity in contrast with

the others at the same time as contributing to the beauty of the whole. A large national society is a communion of communities, each one of them a closely knit communion of members sharing the same cultural, philosophical and religious values. Religious diversity does often lead to conflicts and religious wars. But this is obviously a sign of immaturity, and is owing to lack of respect for others, and an unconscious sense of personal insecurity. Religion should rather be the dynamic principle of interaction and harmony among various communities within a nation. For, religion provides the deepest reason for unity and love among the members of the same faith, and also a reason for reaching out to others to proclaim the community's faith and the reason for its hope. If religious faith is recognized as a divine gift, one cannot keep it a private property and personal privilege, but has to consider it also a trust that has value and relevance for others as well.

In order to define the correct interrelationship among different religious traditions in a society, one has to define first of all what constitutes the identity of a religion and religious community. This to a great extent is the specific doctrine and message of the religion. Irenaeus at the beginning of Christianity answered the question as to what constituted a "true Christian doctrine". For him any true Christian doctrine should be in accord with the Scriptures. Passages of Scripture, however, just like passages of Homer, should be interpreted in their proper contexts. There is a certain continuity in the interpretation of Scripture through the tradition created by the Apostles, the immediate disciples of Jesus Christ, who confirmed and amplified Scriptures. This authentic interpretation of Scriptures is still continued in the Christian community under the leadership of Bishops. Thus each religion or religious community has its own specific doctrine and also a body of doctrine about those doctrines, defining specific test by which a particular doctrine is judged authentic or not.

But the problem in specifically defining the doctrine of a community is in the great volume of literature purporting to express the teaching of the community, various literary types in which the material is presented, the different times and historical contexts in which the books were produced, and the shifting scopes such as polemical, apologetic, spiritual or mystical, they

had in view. Besides, the same tradition may have contrasting strands of thought and practice that exist side by side, and the tradition itself is in dialogue with alien patterns of life, which impinge on the life of the members. Moreover, the question about the specific doctrines of a particular religion is often raised by outsiders: historians, anthropologists, sociologists, psychologists, or philosophers; attorneys, judges, legal scholars, politicians and public administrators. But the same question may be raised also within the community, as to what the membership in the community commits people to on some point at issue. Teachers of religion may want to know what they should teach. There may be also a need to settle disagreements within the community regarding doctrinal issues. The difference between the outsider and the insider asking the same question is that the member has a moral stake in the doctrinal issue, while the outsider may not be in a position to speak in the name of the community, though he may have a theoretical knowledge better than that of most of the members.

The question about the authentic doctrine of a religion may not be decided simply by an appeal to the belief of the majority of the members of the past nor of the present. In the past the majority may have held some doctrine owing to some wrong circumstances, or the current belief may be attributed to some degenerate condition of the community. One member or other or those at a given time may not be taken as the authentic spokesperson for the community. Here the emphasis shifts from what the true community teaches to what is the true community? The criteria for authenticity are different from the criteria of the prevalence of some teaching. Historical and sociological considerations also are not enough by themselves. To survive, a community must have a life of its own; it must have reasons for existing which go beyond the fact that it has happened to exist, reasons for teaching beyond what some or all members have happened to believe and act in certain ways. Internal questions call for answers with a normative force, and the ground of some such obligation must be rooted in the community's conception of itself.

Generally the tendency of each religion is to remain enclosed in itself, satisfied with its own doctrines, values and practices,

explain them to its own membership, and treat the others as mere outsiders. This religious isolationism comes from a presumption that one's own religion is superior to all others, and its fund of knowledge something secret and special. Members of the religion were even forbidden to disclose its mysteries to non-initiates. But this religious hermetism, in fact, was only the expression of a cultural isolation. Religious doctrines are viewed not as expressive symbols or truth-claims, "but as communally authoritative rules of discourse, attitude, and action" (see George Lindbeck: *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*, Westminster, 1984, p. 18). Theology itself is conceived as an intratextual, interpretive explanation, which trains its attention on what institutions, actions, images, utterances, events, customs mean to the members of a particular confession. In anthropological terms, it is simply the systematic unpacking of the conceptual world of a particular religious group.

But this sectarian approach to religion contradicts the transcendent origin of religious faith and meaning, which as a divine movement of absolute self-gift has an infinitely regressive character. It cannot be taught or expressed within any one single, cultural or linguistic province. Unity of the human race and the validity and relevance of the message of one's religion to the rest of humanity is supposed by every religion. All believers admit that escape from the present anomalous condition of human beings is a return to the realization of their authentic condition, and for most religions it means an intimate union with the divine reality. Every fundamental concept of religion, like faith, salvation, saviour, Godhead, and Sacrament, has a twofold movement, one inwards building up the identity of the socio-cultural and religious body of adult human beings taking seriously their ultimate concerns of life, and the other outwards reaching to other communities and all members of the human family. Fully developed religious faith as found in the Major Religions of the world is both unique and universal.

Community-building dynamics of faith

Faith is the most fundamental character of any religion. Talking about any religious group one naturally asks: "What do they believe?" There are people who treat faith as a purely interior state, not a discriminable experience belonging to the

common behaviour of human beings and constituting any natural resemblance among them (see Rodney Needham: *Belief, Language and Experience*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1972, p. 188). There are others who will distinguish between faith as denoting personal response to transcendent qualities, the critical, underlying feature of religion, and belief as its propositional expression of holding certain ideas (see Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Faith and Belief*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton Univ. Press, 1979, p. 12). But originally the Greek *pisteuo* and the Hebrew 'mn and their cognates denoted a conduct that honoured an agreement or bond, and hence had a social orientation. For the Hebrews faith was the response to the Covenant of Yahweh and the same fidelity was extended to the socio-political relationship of human beings (see *The New International Dictionary of N. T. Theology*, ed. C. Brown, *Fatih, Belief etc.*).

The specific cultural orientation of the Judeo-Christian and Islamic traditions was shaped by the anthropology of the Middle East where the three religions had their origins. In the desert environment and the context of a nomadic or semi-nomadic or tribal existence human beings realized the importance and precariousness of their individualities and religion was encountering an other, a wholly other, and entering into a kind of treaty with him. So faith was very much fidelity to one's word, and to the covenant the Lord of heaven initiated with his earthly subjects. This naturally led to an individualism, which held each one solely responsible for his actions.

Derivatively *pistis* or faith came to denote the belief held also collectively by the believers as a common conviction. The unity and identity of Christians was defined by Paul as "one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Eph. 4:4-5). It was the emphasis on the collective belief that brought the emphasis on the substance of the shared belief, which in turn led to the formulation of creeds and dogmas and anathematization of those who departed from the declared content of faith. The creeds emerged as statements of received teaching which applicants for admission to the Church had to subscribe to as condition for their baptism. Dogmas and formal declarations of ecumenical councils came to resolving disputes and controversies and eliminating dissenters.

In fact, Islam found the remedy for individualism and

the jungle law of might is right by making faith the inner life of the Umma, the people. Faith was not merely an ascent to God above or lack of faith a fall. Movement is expressed horizontally than vertically. Hence *jama'a* to gather or join, is good, while *faraqa*, to separate is bad. *Jama'a*, the community ruled by *ijma*, consensus is the ideal, while *firqa*, sect and other forms of disunity are bad. Rather faith signified an entry into the deeper sanctum of the people and lack of faith was a falling out, becoming an outcast. *Sharia* literally meaning "the path leading to a watering place", introduced later to mean obedience in faith, stands for a complex web of laws, activities and institutions that contributed to the identity and culture of the Muslim world. Much more than a guide to government conduct, sharia served as a regulator of social relationships, of property, business transactions, marriages and public morals.

In Hinduism the concept of faith was expressed by the word *sraddha*, which in the Vedas was considered human rational response to *rita*, the cosmic ground of truth and duty. The first of its early elements was the focus on an Other, ordinarily one of the Vedic Gods, calling upon him for blessings and prosperity (see RV I, 102:2; 104:6 etc.). Next it is associated with *Soma*, the inebriating sacrificial drink which produced the religious zeal basic to faith in both the god and the suppliant. (see RV I, 108:6; VI, 26:6; IX, 113:2). Since occasionally the departed ancestors also were invoked, later the term *sraddha* came to be applied also to the offerings made to the ancestral dead. Faith is even personified as the effective force behind sacrifices, performed by competent priests (RV X, 151:1-5).

The main concern, however, of Hindu religious thought is to arrive at the maternal womb of all things, that from which are the origin, sustenance and final dissolution of all things. Hence the focus of faith is not one single divine person or reality, but the sacrificial system, linking the ritual, the priestly operators and the offerings and the people for whom the offerings are made. An important element of the Vedic concept of *sraddha* is the "posture or the attitude which fills the believer and makes him receptive to religious transformation" (see Ellison Banks Findly, "Ananda's Hindrance: Faith (*sraddha*) in Early Buddhism" Journ. Indian Phil. 20(1992) 253-73). Thus

according to Gita, faith becomes an essential or constitutive element of the human being: 'A person's faith conforms to his essential nature; faith constitutes the very being of man. As the nature of his faith, so he is' (XVII, 3).

Buddhism does not depart from this essential structure of faith as other-orientation. This other is the total structure consisting of the three Jewels, the ideal personality of Buddha, the liberated One, his dhamma or teaching and the samgha, the community of the Arhats. Focusing on this threefold structure of experience one attains a realization of the emptiness of all phenomenal reality. As Nagasena explains to Meander in the Milindapanna, *sraddha* is the magic ring which by its touch transforms the muddy waters of life into a crystal clear spring, and the confidence which enables one to take a leap in the dark and reach the other shore of tranquillity.

John B. Chethimattam

The Spiritual Journey: A Traveller's Story

As long as people of different faiths remain apart without mutual communication there is only misunderstanding. But from chance contacts confidence is built up and instead of each other as adversaries they face problems together. This is the personal faith-pilgrimage of each one. Only in this way one understands the community-building dynamics of religion.

A preamble and some disclaimers

There seems to be something pretentious in telling the story of one's "spiritual journey" without being asked to do so. I have however had the opportunity over the last forty-three years or more to have lived in several different spiritual universes: twenty four years in the Jesuits, eleven of those years as a Roman Catholic priest; graduate studies in theology in Rome during the Second Vatican Council; six years of seminary teaching in the late sixties; a research fellowship at a Protestant (Yale) divinity school; twenty years in the higher education administration and, most recently, five years as director of the Wainwright House program for the training of spiritual guides, most of whose participants were women, few of whom were Roman Catholic.

I do not think my experience is unique, but I do feel that my "journey" has involved a crisscrossing of borders between the church, the academy and what may with appropriate vagueness be called "new age" 'spirituality'. Or at least

¹ "New age", as I use it here, refers not to any single spiritual position or practice but is a shorthand term to describe a complex spiritual movement, marked in varying degrees by an openness to Eastern spirituality, Jungian psychology, non-traditional approaches to healing, feminist and ecological concerns. Because it is such a "mixed bag" and because

I have felt as if I were crossing borders, and as I have "crossed" I believe I have also become sensitive to the different concerns and even different languages of these different territories. Keeping to the metaphor, I have felt at times that I was becoming a little like a man without a country — always a visitor, perhaps even a chameleon, seeming to change colors as I have moved from country to country².

Since I have made friends in all these territories, I would like to introduce them to one another. But first I would like to be open about what I think I am doing and not doing here. I am not out to proselytize, but I had hoped that I could share with my new age friends a better understanding of what traditional Christian and even Roman Catholic spirituality is all about and what it might contribute to the spiritual search. Or I would hope that by hearing me tell of my own experience they might at least have more of an insider's view of the complex phenomenon of Roman Catholicism and its spirituality. But as I have tried to tell my own story I have also realized that my principal concern remains the reformation of Roman Catholicism or, in a broader sense, of institutional Christianity. Building bridges to the new age may come later. Right now, there is still some dismantling to do.

I am not out to excoriate the church (or Church) again for its irrelevancy. But I do want my former churchmen colleagues and my "liberal" Catholic friends to know why I do not think their efforts at reform and renewal go far enough towards restoring what has been called, ineloquently perhaps, but significantly, "the transformative power of religion". I do

some of its adherents tend to emphasize one or another spiritual technique as uniquely salvific, it is easy to caricature "the new age" or, in a sort of theological McCarthyism, to write it off as a Gnosticism once and for all rejected in the third century A. D. I believe both of these approaches are ill-advised and miss spiritual concerns of the movement.

2 My friends, who may know me better than I know myself, may discern a characteristically "Jesuit" identity beneath what I have experienced as a changing identity. Perhaps so. But I certainly don't feel like a Jesuit and I doubt that many, if any, Jesuits could share fully what has come to be my own perspective on Roman Catholicism. In any case, I hope these notes will be a clearer statement than I have yet been able to give my friends of where I really stand on religion and spirituality.

not believe that ending obligatory clerical celibacy, ordaining women, increasing "lay" participation, writing pastorals on contemporary issues—good and wise as all those moves might be—really get to the heart of the matter. The "heart of the matter" is, I have come to believe, the church's own self-understanding and its reluctance to question itself right down to its roots.

Finally, I want to say clearly at this outset that there will be nothing I say here that is not already known to my academic colleagues in theology. I do however feel that academic theologians, especially if they are also churchmen (churchwomen might be different), are too hesitant about drawing personal conclusions from their critical studies, especially conclusions which might require a redefinition of dogmatic "faith".

In that connection I will refer at times to the work of Thomas Sheehan of Loyola University, first published as a review article in *The New York Review of Books* and then expanded into a book entitled *The First Coming*. I do not mean to cite Sheehan here as an authority or this work of his as scholarly groundbreaking. Nor do I intend to write my own story as a dialogue with Thomas Sheehan. I do however believe that, in his work, which has not received the attention I think it deserves, he has drawn some of those conclusions which I miss in the work of most academic theologians. In that respect I hope to imitate him even if I do not fully share his conclusions.

In praising Sheehan for his conclusions, and in setting out to draw a few myself, I do not mean to exaggerate academic certainty. As any historian of ideas knows, academic positions, for all the certainty with which they are usually presented, are in fact tentative, approximate and reformable. Let me say clearly therefore that I suspect I share the historian's temperamental skepticism about any position as "final" or irreformable, be it a theory of knowledge, a Scriptural interpretation or a papally defined doctrine. This does not say that I find truth irrelevant or every historical interpretation equally right—or wrong—or that the search for truth is futile. But if asked where I stand on any important question the only honest answer I can,

or want to, give must begin with, "As of now, and from the (presently) fixed points..."

For the purpose of these "traveller's notes" I have named those fixed points as the chronological stages in my spiritual journey. I have tried to describe that journey as a move from a good and satisfying Roman Catholic starting point through a growing personal awareness of the Protestant Reformation and its values, into an increasing openness to Buddhist spirituality and then home for a "visit" to Roman Catholicism. I fear that this journey may seem excessively bookish to some of my friends and colleagues. Much of my life has indeed been taken up with books, and I cherish many books as friends too, but I want to assure my non-book friends that I at least have not experienced the journey as a mere intellectual exercise, but as a long conversation which I want now to share.

So let us begin.

I. The starting point: Roman catholic roots

Although I now date the real starting point of my spiritual journey somewhere in the late sixties, especially under the influence of Bonhoeffer's *Letters from Prison*, my own reading of Luther and the (Catholic) Karl Rahner's honest attempt to give meaning to the word "God", I would still like to say something about the incipient traveller I was in 1965 — by then a restless Abraham just waiting to hear even the suggestion that I leave Ur of the Chaldees.

It had been that way for a long time but it was not always so.

I was born in 1930, the youngest of two sons and two daughters in a Catholic family. Both of my parents had been born in New York, my father of Irish-born parents, my mother of an Irish-born mother and a Yankee Methodist father who had converted to Catholicism, presumably to marry my Irish Catholic grandmother.

I cannot describe my family as stereotypically "Catholic" if that stereotype implies either anti-intellectualism or the rigid moralism that seem to be prominent in so many disaffected Catholic autobiographies. Both of my parents were unquestioningly Catholic, my father was active in church affairs, had a

brother priest and many close priest friends, but despite leaving school at a very early age, he had had great success in magazine publishing and had associated with a large circle of well-educated, mostly Protestant colleagues. Books were all over our house, and despite his own very brief formal education, my father communicated to all of his children a love of books and of learning. Our house was hardly agnostic. We were in many ways traditionally Catholic but my family memories are not much like Mary McCarthy's *Memories of a Catholic Girlhood*.

In one respect Mary McCarthy and I have had at least similar memories. She found the Religious of the Sacred Heart open and intellectually exciting teachers. Those are my memories too of Regis (Jesuit) High School in New York. As a student at Regis I was blessed with teachers whom I loved and who developed an intellectual combativeness which I think of as my chief strength, and/or perhaps my greatest weakness on "the spiritual journey"³.

Almost inevitably (or now it so seems), I decided to enter the Jesuits at seventeen. I did the usual Jesuit course of study — two years of Novitiate, by that time in Jesuit history a more or less rote introduction to spirituality, which I now believe never really "took" for me, two years of classical studies which didn't add much to what Regis had given me, three years and an M. A. in philosophy at St. Louis University, which sharpened even further my agonistically intellectual bent, three years of high school teaching and four years of seminary theology. Those last four years were especially good ones. I was again blessed with good teachers, had a good critical introduction to Scripture and shared in much of the French ferment (I read more theology in French in those days than in English) which came to its flowering in the Second Vatican Council. I was ordained to the Roman Catholic priesthood in 1960.

It would however be totally misleading to describe those

3 The Jesuit scholar, Walter Ong, has described Jesuit education as "agonistic" (combative, competitive) rather than truly "intellectual". I have come to believe he is right. I think my mother had the same insight when she used to say "Jesuit schools make good priests and lawyers". I also overheard her say once, talking of my brother and myself, "The only thing that went wrong in my family is that the priest became a lawyer and the lawyer became a priest."

years as peaceful ones. Although I found my studies in philosophy and theology stimulating, I was also engaged, almost from the beginning, in my own *agon* (or "struggle" or "agony"). I think I realized within two weeks of entering the Jesuits that I did not want to live a celibate life. A more impersonal way of saying the same thing is that I was not "suited" to the celibate life, but the blandness of that expression — as if some sort of aptitudinal or psychological testing might have helped me avoid "the problem" — does not express the personal conflict I experienced. I did not *want* to be celibate but I believed it was "God's will" that I conform to that extrinsic demand. — I did so, in fact, for roughly twenty four years.

Probably because of the intense conflict I felt over celibacy, I soon began to have intense religious doubts. Much of my study, my intellectual "agon" and even the decision to pursue graduate studies in theology was an attempt to resolve those persistent doubts. After about eleven years of Jesuit life, a Jesuit superior allowed me to begin therapy with a Freudian-oriented, Christian analyst. That first experience of psychotherapy (there would be three subsequent attempts before I felt that the issues were resolved) gave me what I believed was sufficient reason to continue to ordination to the priesthood, which, in our Catholic culture of the fifties and early sixties was understood, almost above all, to be a final and irrevocable commitment to celibacy.

Ordination was nonetheless a very anxious experience for me. I went ahead with it, in part, because I was carried along by a process which I did not feel able to interrupt — invitations were out, the family was prepared, a church was scheduled for the first Mass. In part too I was, by that time, psychologically strong enough to make something like a leap of faith into an unknown future and towards an increasingly mysterious "God" — not a very "rational" decision but one which I believed would somehow work out. Had I not made that decision to go ahead, my life would have been very different. I think I might now be working for a corporate law firm. I would certainly have missed out on an intellectual and spiritual journey for which I have no regrets. In that sense, at least, I

do believe the decision could indeed be said to have "worked out" in ways I never then anticipated.

II. Leaving home: going Protestant in the sixties

Two years after ordination I left for Rome to begin doctoral studies in theology. I arrived in Rome on the very day the Second Vatican Council opened and stayed there for just over two years. The Council has come to be considered a watershed in Roman Catholic life, rightly so perhaps for some of the tendencies in Catholic thought which it ratified. Just how significant these changes were, might be suggested by the fate of one of my own former teachers (John Courtney Murray) who had been effectively "silenced" in the late fifties for his positions on Church and state and was then invited to Rome as an "expert" on religious freedom. Or by the fate of another Jesuit theologian, Henri de Lubac, who had been a major target of conservative Vatican critics in the early fifties and was named a Cardinal in the sixties.

Of all times to be in Rome, the years of the Second Vatican Council were surely among the best. It was a time of great religio-political intrigue — Roman Catholicism's pervasive weakness — and of extraordinary theological excitement. The Council was not however a moment of great importance in my own spiritual journey. I was much more influenced by the reading I was doing for my dissertation on the seventeenth century theology of Cornelius Jansen, a sort of founder of what came to be dreaded in even the most faintly liberal Catholic theology as "Jansenism". (In fact, I realized through these studies that Jansenism, like every historical movement, is a very complex phenomenon and one not easily written off as just a theological distortion.) What was of great importance in my own spiritual journey, was that Jansen led me back to Augustine and through Augustine, to a deeper awareness of what the Swedish Protestant theologian, Krister Stendahl, has called "the introspective conscience of the West", i.e., an awareness of negativity and "fallenness" which extends at least from Augustine (not from St. Paul, Stendahl rightly or wrongly claims) right down to Freud and twentieth century existentialism.

That felt contact with "fallenness" and a corresponding awareness of grace as "liberating grace" had become part of me when I returned from Rome to teach at a Jesuit seminary in early 1965. It became even more important to me when I was asked to teach a course on the theology of grace in the Protestant Reformers and a systematic course on "sin, grace and redemption" in the Christian tradition.

Although I did not realize it at the time, my constructing new—now ecumenical—courses on Luther and Calvin was in fact a big step towards leaving home and the Jesuits. My earlier work on the Augustinian tradition represented by Cornelius Jansen was certainly a good introduction to the Augustinianism of the Protestant Reformers. To say that I then found myself "going Protestant" is perhaps too facile and may even be misleading in this ecumenical age, when differences between Protestants and Catholics on central theological issues are a lot more difficult to identify than seemed to be the case in the thirties and forties. In any case, by 1965 academic theology, as opposed to what might still have been taught in more traditionally orthodox seminaries, was already a common Protestant-Catholic enterprise. Nevertheless my own theology became more consciously "Protestant" as I continued to teach courses on the theology of the Reformers. The Reformation doctrine of justification by faith, or better yet, "by grace", however "old hat" to Protestants, made sense to my newly Augustinian soul, more than ever aware of, and comfortable in admitting, our "fallenness"⁴. Ecumenical readings also enabled me to rediscover greater freedom (and Protestant themes) in pre-Reformation Catholicism which I found much more open than Post-Tridentine Catholicism. Having become sensitive in Luther to the power of "the Gospel", I also became increasingly sensitive to the hardening of religion in the ecclesiastical institution and the consequent loss of religion's "transformative power".

4 Today I might find resonances of the Augustinian conception of "fallenness" in notions such as karma or the Jungian "shadow" and parallels to grace in the Tao, but that belongs to a later stage in the story. And still today, while finding value in Matthew Fox's not at all that untraditional "creation centered" theology, I find his anti-Augustine polemic historically unfair and religiously unwise.

Even while getting close to Luther's "here I stand" and a felt need to break with the ecclesiastical institution, I was not likely to take my stand on a fundamentalist reading of Scripture. (In fact, Luther was no fundamentalist either.) My earlier and continuing studies in Scripture had been based on an historical and critical reading of the Bible which had also been important to me spiritually. If I list the study of Scripture as one moment in the process of my "going Protestant" in the sixties, it was not because I had found some contradiction between the Bible and the Roman Church. If anything, Scriptural studies in the sixties had become—for both Protestants and Catholics—a completely ecumenical endeavour. There was however a subtle difference between Protestant and Catholic conclusions from their critical studies of Scripture and especially of the Gospels. Catholics tended to regard the skepticism born of historical inquiry as nonetheless open to being overridden by the traditional dogmatic formulations of Christian faith. Protestants tended to stay more with what had become known as "the quest for the historical Jesus".

Both as a student and as a teacher I felt more comfortable with "the quest" and its concern to ground faith in history. For me, commitment to the historical "quest" makes it impossible to think of Jesus exclusively as an *avatar* or, in any sense, simply as "one among many"⁵. In recent years, as I have become more sensitive to the mystical element in religion, I have also come to believe that there is a legitimate mystical reading of Jesus' significance but I would be untrue to my deepest convictions if I let go of at least the search for the historical Jesus. (For the same reason I cannot speak easily of Jesus and the Buddha in the same breath, not because I think Jesus is "divine" and the Buddha is not, but because I know they lived in different "worlds". It is therefore more important

5 I still remember vividly my own excitement at an article of Bishop John Robinson — before he wrote his *Honest to God* — through which I became aware of what may have been Jesus' attempt to redefine his ministry *vis à vis* that of the Baptist. That was the beginning of my own "quest" and of a new and realistic relationship to Jesus. — Concern for history is also one place in which I feel uncomfortable with an exclusively "mystical" new age spirituality.

for me to stress their differences so that they can be related to each other rather than too easily conflated.) This emphasis on history, with all the skepticism it entails and is ready to live with, is, I think, more characteristically Protestant than Catholic, and was to that extent a moment of my sixties' journey.

Another major influence on me in the sixties was Dietrich Bonhoeffer's proposal that God was leading a world-come-of-age to live "as if God were not" (*etiamsi Deus non daretur*). Once again, although Bonhoeffer was emphatically Protestant, his reluctance to use God-language to explain worldly events fitted in with what I knew to be an often ignored but well-established Catholic understanding of God's transcendence and incomprehensibility. Even in the sixties Catholic theologians such as Karl Rahner and Gregory Baum were appealing to their own tradition to say it would be possible to rewrite the Creed without ever using the word "God". This Christian agnosticism, even, in a sense, Christian "atheism" was unknown in the pews and never preached from the pulpit, but I knew it was an accepted strand in Catholic theology. Bonhoeffer proclaimed this tradition dramatically and in a Protestant mode, and spoke to me very personally. More than that, Bonhoeffer became for me something of a role model — the Christian pastor who counseled his fellow prisoners, led them in prayer and prayed each day himself, all the while striving to live without a "God of the gaps", i.e., without a God who would function as a *deus ex machina*, and with a God to be spoken of most cautiously, if at all.

During the sixties I also became more and more concerned with the technical notion of "dogma" and its history. I can very well understand what Cardinal Newman meant when he said that from adolescence he had had a "dogmatic" temperament. The "dogmatic mind", as I understand it here, finds in religious propositions the primary material of its meditation — a yoga of knowledge, the Gita might say. This is not, as other psychological types sometimes suspect, a mere intellectualizing of religious aspirations and still less a religious literalism or fundamentalism. In fact, one could have this "dogmatic mind" and still not disagree with Martin Buber's suggestion that dogma might be the major obstacle to religion. One who has this dogmatic

temperament will however take doctrinal formulations seriously, if not literally, and, in practice, seems more inclined to revise, revision and reformulate doctrines rather than simply to jettison them. Thus, for sure, I was in the sixties.

My own understanding of "dogma" was moreover formed by an increasing awareness of the history of the concept and indeed of its distortion as Catholics (and orthodox Protestants) took on the basic assumptions of their Enlightenment adversaries. Doctrine was understood far more instrumentally and even "symbolically" by earlier Christian theologians (including, I believe, Aquinas) for whom it was more of an intimation of God, something closer to T. S. Eliot's "hints and guesses, hints followed by guesses" than it was to scientific propositions.

The more comfortable I became with this "dogmatic tentativeness" — not the oxymoron it might seem to be — the more uncomfortable I became with notions of "infallibility". In many ways I felt myself to be in a "Catholic tradition", with roots in Aquinas and branches towards such Catholic theologians as Karl Rahner and Eduard Schillebeeckx, but with an increasingly Reformation feeling towards Rome, a very definitely Lutheran feeling about clerical celibacy (I had only to skim Luther's critique of religious vows in *de votis monasticis* to know it made good sense to me,) and involved in what I would describe as a more typically Protestant than Catholic "quest for the historical Jesus".

It did not occur to me at that time to join a Protestant *church*, since I had come to think of the Protestant Reformation as a "Catholic" movement—and still think of it that way. I did not believe that I would find a living Reformation tradition even in the Protestant churches, but I found myself increasingly alienated from institutional Catholicism. Thus, in 1971 I left the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) and, in the not very accurate corporate language of the post-Vatican II era, resigned from the priesthood and married Ann.

Then (and now) I much preferred the older language of the Church: I was, by choice, "secularized" by Rome. "Secularization" was (and is) a good word to me, summarizing what I took to be God's hidden presence in Bonhoeffer's "world come of age". Twenty years later, I might admit that secularization

is a more complex and even ambiguous phenomenon than it seemed in the exciting days of the theological sixties, but I remain deeply suspicious of any easy use of religious language and as concerned as then to articulate a this-worldly meaning of that language. (I was not very interested in the historical or socio-logical meaning of "secularization" in the sixties and I am still not very interested in those meanings.) Since the sixties, however, I have read some Heidegger and much Eckhart. And when Eckhart prays "I pray God free me from God", I think I know what *he* means and I would like to think that he and Bonhoeffer and I, starting from different places and perhaps on somewhat different tangents, are nonetheless on the same journey—and with some patient effort might be able to bring Augustine and Aquinas and Luther along with us.

III. The Buddhist connection

About three years after Ann and I had married, a close friend, and fellow former Jesuit, began a program of transcendental meditation. Impressed by what he claimed the program did for him, but not ready to try it myself, I read Lawrence Le Shan's little book, *How to Meditate*, and began to meditate twenty minutes a day.

With that small beginning in meditation began my turn eastward, or what I now like to call "the Buddhist connection".

My first serious contact with Buddhism dates back to the 1950's when I read Romano Guardini's *The Lord*. In that book, which is perhaps the most thoughtful life of Christ available in Catholic writing, Guardini sets up an opposition between Jesus and the Buddha not on dogmatic grounds but as two irreconcilable human options: Jesus in agony before his death and the enlightened Buddha moving peacefully into his death. I am not sure that I would still accept that opposition but I do believe there is a radical, not necessarily irreconcilable, opposition between these two "ways", so that whether I start from the Buddha's own teaching or from the quest for the historical Jesus, I have no patience with easy talk of "Jesus, Buddha and other great religious figures".

With meditation however something happened to me which I can only describe as an opening up and out to Eastern spirituality. Reflecting on it, I think that when I began to meditate

in Zen Buddhist fashion, I accepted a Buddhist commitment to search for my own truth. I had already jettisoned "unquestionable dogma" even on the grounds of what I understood to be a valid reading of one authentic strand in Christian theology. Now I was searching in a new, more open way for my own faith.

I was not then and I am not now a Buddhist scholar, nor do I have the grasp of Buddhist thought which my whole life's training has given me for Christian theology. I am however attracted to a "Buddhist scholasticism", especially in its Zen form. I find over and over again seeming convergences between Buddhist agnosticism and the Christian agnosticism of Aquinas, Eckhart and the mystical tradition. Buddhist thought—*dukkha*, *anatta*, *anicca*—serve as recurring foils for my Christian thought.

In effect, Buddhism has come to function for me like the study of a second great religious language. Max Muller, the nineteenth century German philologist, is reported to have said that no one can know his own language until he has learned a second language. While Christian and Buddhist concepts are on the surface very different, even contradictory, I have found that the effort to understand *dukkha* ("suffering" or "unhappiness" in a very technical Buddhist sense), *anatta* ("no self") and *anicca* ("impermanence") have led me to a better understanding of "creatureliness", of the Scriptural "Unless the grain of wheat fall into the ground and itself die", of much of the Sermon on the Mount and many other sayings of Jesus which, through familiarity, have lost their paradoxical, shock value for Christians.

The Buddhist *sangha* ("monastic community") has also developed a rich disciplinary tradition, much of which sounds very familiar to one who has lived in a Jesuit novitiate. Learned as a second language, however, this disciplinary tradition can be inwardly tested, evaluated and appreciated bit by bit without also taking on the baggage that a less critical acceptance of one's own tradition often entails. Finally, Buddhism, even in its Zen form, is very ritualistic, but once again the distance between oneself and a "second language" allows first a critical stance towards the ritual and then — at least this was my experience — a deeper appreciation of ritual itself, both in one's own and in the "new" tradition.

Thomas Merton has said that one cannot be a "Buddhist" and a "Catholic" if one takes these as two "religions" or total systems. Certainly a person cannot be both Buddhist and Christian if he or she takes Buddhism to be, at best, a humanly evolved effort to solve the problem of suffering and Christianity as a set of truths somehow "dropped from heaven" and/or thus "revealed". But if one regards both these great traditions as human efforts to make sense of our humanity and, in Christian terms, also as vehicles of a generous "God's" grace, then the two traditions can indeed be lived by one seeker, even if at times in a dialectical relationship.

I have recently found that I had to decide just where I stood on this relationship. I have joined a Zen sitting group conducted by a Zen priest who had also embraced Christianity after many years of her Zen practice. In our somewhat improvised *zendo* we conclude our sitting with the four vows of the Bodhisattva and an (optional) homage to the Buddha. Prostrating myself to an image of Kannon (one of the many manifestations of the Buddha) was a little difficult for me as I recalled the tales of those ancient Christians who died rather than sacrifice to idols!⁶ And I had to ask myself how I could respond — as I do — to the Christian Eucharist on Sunday and do homage to a Buddha on Monday.

The answer to that last question is that for me each of those acts is a response to a different "calling". By my history I am a Christian, raised and willingly staying in a community that grew out of the disciples' commitment to Jesus who had become "mystery" to them and named "Lord". In sharing in the Eucharist I do exactly what the Scripture says — I recall Jesus in his life and above all on the night before his death and the sacrificial interpretation which either he or his disciples gave to his death. I also share in the process by which Jesus

6 I have since learned that the Buddhist bow isn't a bow to "anyone" or "anything" but an expression of one's willingness to empty oneself of all hindrances to enlightenment. I accept this "atheological" understanding but I would not be sure that the average Buddhist does! I also accept, as one of my friends has said, that understanding all of Buddhism through Zen practice would be like understanding the entire Christian tradition through the Quaker meeting. But then again, the Quaker meeting might not be a bad place to begin to understand Christianity.

became for the disciples "Mystery" — "the Christ" and allow myself to be led by the tradition while still awaiting the vision which the tradition promises. And by doing that I enter also into a process by which "God" is defined for me — but not yet seen — in Jesus, "the Christ". In devotionally acknowledging "the Buddha", whom I have come to know only in a "second language", I honor the founder of a great human tradition and I bow as one on whom Sakyamuni would presumably have compassion. More than that, I acknowledge in that tradition, the power and the Logos which the disciples found manifest in the life of Jesus and which is brought to expression in the epistles of Paul and the Gospel of John.

I doubt that my explanation would be acceptable to most orthodox Christians or to equally "orthodox" Buddhists. Nor do I mean to suggest that Jesus and Sakyamuni were on the same path. But I believe they shared, in different ways, in our common human vocation, and I want to bring them into dialogue in myself. I know it will be difficult for me to keep that dialogue honest, without subverting either Jesus or Sakyamuni, but every religious and theological instinct I have tells me that the task is one I ought to pursue. Once again, I am not sure how the journey will turn out, but I know the journey is worth taking. I know that I personally will not have the time or the resources to bring this process to a scholarly ("theological") conclusion, but it does not seem at all unthinkable to me that Vatican V or VI will be a Christian-Buddhist Council of equal importance with the Councils of Nicaea and Chalcedon, which were determinative of so much Christian history. In the meantime I hope to keep "sitting" in faithfulness to the callings I have myself experienced.

IV. A visit home: Roman Catholicism in the nineties

If I describe my current relationship to Roman Catholicism as "a visit home" it is to express both the commitment I continue to feel to that tradition and the distance I feel from so many of its "official" formulations. I often feel, in that sense, like one who, no longer living at home, looks at the family with both a new independence and the continuing loyalty which only a "family member" can feel.

If I choose to describe my own relationship to "the family"

in conversation with Thomas Sheehan, it is because I believe Sheehan has described accurately what he calls the "liberal (Catholic) consensus" in theology, i.e., the present state of the search for the historical Jesus in the work of Catholic exegetes and theologians.

Sheehan's first statement on the subject (an article which appeared in the June 14, 1984 New York Review of Books) was a review of Hans Kung's book, *Eternal Life? Life After Death as a Medical, Philosophical and Theological Problem*, which (review) was headlined in The New York Review as "The End of Catholicism".

Before taking up Kung's reading of the Gospel accounts of Jesus' "resurrection", Sheehan says:

"In Roman Catholic seminaries, for example, it is now common teaching that Jesus of Nazareth did not assert any of the divine or Messianic claims the Gospels attribute to him and that he died without believing he was Christ or the Son of God, not to mention the founder of a new religion."

"Moreover, according to the consensus, although Jesus had a reputation as a faith healer during his life, it is likely that he performed very few 'miracles', perhaps only two. (Probably he never walked on water.) And it seems he ordained no priests and consecrated no bishops, indeed that he did not know that he was supposed to establish the Holy Roman Catholic and Apostolic Church with St. Peter as the first in a long line of infallible popes. In fact, Jesus had no intention of breaking with Judaism in order to constitute a separate Church. Rather he restricted his mission to Jews and called on his disciples to repent, to celebrate the dawning of God's kingdom, and perhaps to expect the imminent arrival of an apocalyptic figure called 'the Son of Man', whom Jesus never identified with himself."

Coming directly to Jesus' "resurrection" Sheehan notes quite accurately the consensus of contemporary (Catholic) exegetes that the stories of the empty tomb were developed independently of the appearance stories and were only later linked with those stories, i.e., the belief in Jesus' resurrection originated independently of any discovery of an empty tomb. Finally, and bluntly, Sheehan suggests that for Hans Kung (and presumably for

others who share the liberal consensus) Jesus' resurrection does not require an empty tomb at all. "It seems, too that he (Kung) leaves the corpse of Jesus, corrupted by physical death, in whatever tomb it may now occupy." More positively, the resurrection (for Kung) means that "somehow Jesus went to heaven, with or without his physical body" and that "God gave Jesus eternal life".

Once again, I cite Sheehan at this length not as an authority, whose word is to be taken, but because I believe this starkly skeptical reading of the historical data *does* indeed represent a scholarly consensus. Sheehan notes moreover that for some Catholic exegetes the scholarly consensus does not settle matters. Thus, for example, Raymond Brown's conclusion on Mary's virginity is that "'the totality of *scientifically controllable* evidence leaves an unresolved problem', which calls for ecumenical discussion and, ultimately, resolution within the frame of the teaching authority of the Church". Sheehan also quotes Cardinal William Baum to the effect that even though the *evidence* (my emphasis) of Scripture is inconclusive, the ultimate meaning of Scripture is accessible only to the "apostolic tradition" available in the Church.

Let me say simply that at this point in my own journey, evidence is evidence and that the problem is not that the evidence is inconclusive but that, in any other historical question, I believe an historian would find the claims the New Testament makes for Jesus the likely mythological product of an all too human hope rather than basis of faith. In short, the seeming discrepancy between "the Christ of faith" and "the Christ of history" cannot be set aside by an appeal to the Church's authority without what I believe must be a loss of intellectual honesty.

Sheehan has carried his argument further in his book *The First Coming. How the Kingdom of God Became Christianity*. In this later work he claims that Jesus' own teaching/preaching was of an 'incarnation' of God not in himself but in humanity; that the New Testament doctrine of Jesus' resurrection begins with Peter's own misunderstanding of a post-Calvary experience in Galilee (a "mis-take", according to Sheehan), which eventually becomes linked with a Jerusalem story of an

empty tomb and eventually becomes the full-blown, materialized stories of the later Gospels (Matthew, Luke, John). Similarly, the doctrine of Jesus' "divinity" developed from an early understanding of Jesus as an "eschatological prophet" (a belief about himself which Jesus may have shared) to one who had become "Son of God" at his resurrection, then at his baptism, then at his conception (Matthew and Luke) and finally as a pre-existent ("cosmocreator") in John's prologue and ultimately in the Councils of the Church. All this was, according to Sheehan, a "mis-take" and a reestablishment of "religion" which Jesus had intended to bring to an end in his own preaching of the Kingdom of God as "in our midst".

In all this I think Sheehan intends to be deliberately shocking, quite possibly out of frustration at the reluctance of Catholics, especially of the clergy, to see the implications of historical research now widely recognized by both Catholic and Protestant scholars. (Sheehan depends far more on the Catholics Schillebeeckx, Kung and Raymond Brown than he does on Rudolph Bultmann or Bultmann's Protestant followers.)

These "traveller's notes" are not the place to defend or modify Sheehan's conclusions. For my part, I would say that I believe he has been accurate in presenting the historical evidence as it has been reconstructed by the scholars he cites; that his conclusions are reasonable, if in some places perhaps overly speculative; and — I would argue on his behalf and my own — although widely at variance with what seems to be "official" church teaching, not for that reason un-faithful.

That the New Testament reflects several stages in what Jesus' first followers understood to be his relationship to God and that their "re-thinking" of Jesus begins with what comes to be summarized as his "resurrection" is, I believe, the only conclusion the historical evidence allows. For several years now I have wanted to summarize my own thinking on this question in an essay which would be entitled "Did Jesus Rise From the Dead and What Difference Does It Make?" The first part of this essay would be entitled "I Don't Think So" and it would make the point (first and eloquently made for me by the Protestant theologian, Van Austin Harvey, in *The Historian and The Believer. The Morality of Historical Knowledge*,

and Christian Belief) that if you are going to *think* like an historian, you must think like an *historian*. Given the contradictions and/or confusion in the New Testament evidence and the allegedly "supernatural" character of the event, no historian would conclude that Jesus had indeed "risen from the dead".

The second part of my essay, "And What Difference Does it Make?" would look more closely at the entire early Christian experience, with its own confusions about what the "resurrection" meant (St. Paul struggles with this in the last part of I Corinthians 15) and with the various interpretations of Jesus, his death and "resurrection" given in the New Testament itself. I would argue further that it is vitally important whether we accept the "hints and guesses" of the New Testament as a guide to our own understanding of "God" and the world (it does, therefore "make a difference") but that we can take these "hints and guesses" seriously as our own faith only if we have had something of our own "resurrection experience" — i.e., some sense of what we might call "the presence of God" in the "preaching of the Gospel", whatever form that "preaching" might take.

I recognize that this language is vague. It is deliberately so. I want to emphasize that "faith" is a search, a process of interpretation and re-interpretation (a "hermeneutic" Sheehan would say) rather than the "acceptance of dogmas" or seemingly "objective" doctrines. If I differ from Sheehan it is not in rejecting his negative conclusions but rather in finding more positive value in the search process (even "mis-takes") which the New Testament reflects. In effect, I would argue that the various understandings of Jesus reflected in different strata of the New Testament are all available to us as T. S. Eliot's "hints and guesses" with which we might try to formulate our own faith, based on our own experience of "God" and of our own experience of what we might call "resurrection".

I believe that this understanding of faith can be made consistent with an earlier (patristic and medieval) understanding of faith and dogma, but it is certainly not the "official" Roman Catholic teaching. I have become convinced however that the "official" teaching went wrong when it began to think of its doctrines as "dropped finished from heaven rather than worked out in a laborious human process" (language taken from the

early twentieth century condemnation of Modernism but reflecting several centuries of "hardening"), then located those "truths" in a "supernatural" sphere beyond human reason and finally put those truths under the jurisdiction of an "infallible" Pope. Once these steps had been taken, it was easy enough for authorities in the Church to believe that in defending *their* authority they were defending *God's* authority—a human enough "mis-take" but one which has made faith into an ideology and has made Roman Catholicism and the rich Christian spiritual tradition less and less meaningful to many of our contemporaries most seriously committed to what used to be called "the spiritual life".

So much for the dismantling...

There is however another side to Roman Catholicism—or to what I would prefer to call "the Catholic tradition"—which I have come to appreciate more and more as I have come into closer, more sympathetic contact with Buddhist, Native American and other ritual traditions⁷. On my "visits home" to the parish church (where I am fortunate to have a pastor whom I greatly respect for honesty and integrity) I believe I sense over and over again the power available in the Catholic sacramental tradition. There is also a Catholic intellectual tradition, which may need to be reviewed and revised, but which is in a very real sense *my* tradition and one to which I am unabashedly committed. Even the current Catholic positions on contraception and abortion, which I find overpoliticized and polarized, seem to me to have a reverence for life itself which I don't find in the equally overpoliticized and polarized pronouncements of the ACLU and the "pro-choice" movements.

There is a risk, I know, that reformers are arrogant in their readiness to reform everyone else. I hope I am not arrogant

7 Carl Jung's work on the psychology of religion has also made me far more sensitive than I was once to the "interior significance" of ritual. His "Transformation symbolism in the Mass" is as rich an interpretation of the rubrics at the front of the old Roman missal as the most Catholic of allegories could be, but with a "subjective" side that the missal does not have. New age spirituality is however more devoutly "Jungian" than I would be. While responding to the "interiorization" of symbol and ritual which Jung's work opens up, I am suspicious of what I experience as an excessive "psychologizing" of religion. — I would, in short, prefer to be a "Christian agnostic" than a "Jungian believer".

in that way, but I wish that the "dismantling" I have described could go on so that the real spiritual power of the Catholic tradition could be separated from a notion of "faith" based on a notion of authority which I believe to be "mis-taken".

The Zen teacher, Shunryu Suzuki, says over and over in his book, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, that the purpose of Zen practice is the practice itself, i.e, not for the sake of something else, not even for the purpose of enlightenment. Meister Eckhart says that our God is a "now God" (*ein Gott der Gegenwart*). So too I have come in the course of my own journey to believe we will feel the full sense of our Christian practice and be able to respond to a "now God" more fully when we stop worrying about what God "has done" or what God "will do" if we do our part, and simply become aware of what we are doing right now in our hearing the Scriptures, in our worship, in our feeding the hungry, our visiting the sick and, not least of all, in our burying the dead.

Beyond that, I think we should maintain a respectful silence before a God whom we ought name only most cautiously. Or, more elegantly:

"I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope,
For hope would be hope for the wrong thing; wait without love.
For love would be love of the wrong thing; there is yet faith
But the faith and the love and the hope are all in the waiting.
Wait without thought, for you are not ready for thought:
So the darkness shall be the light, and the stillness the dancing.
Whisper of running streams, and winter lightning.
The wild thyme unseen and the wild strawberry,
The laughter in the garden, echoed ecstasy
Not lost, but requiring, pointing to the agony of death and birth."
(T.S. Eliot, "East Coker", *Four Quartets*)

Epilogue

As I read and re-read these traveller's notes, I suspect that they will be "too Catholic" for some with whom I have shared the journey and "not Catholic enough" for others.

It is certainly true that I have worked out my own faith in a continuing dialogue with the Church's tradition. It is also true that I attend church regularly and that the Christian Eucharist remains the central religious ritual of my life. Even my doubts

are a Catholic sort of doubt. I find it encouraging that Aquinas, at the very beginning of his *Summa Theologiae*, puts the question, *utrum Deus sit* ("whether God is"). After first listing the most human of objections (the fact of evil and the seeming adequacy of nature to explain itself), Aquinas proceeds to develop his so-called "five ways" and ends each with an expression such as "and this is what all people call God". I take this to mean that if one hopes to find a religious answer, one must begin with at least some notion of what one is looking for. And then one will find enough evidence to ground a "demonstration" for Aquinas and those "hints and guesses" on which the rest of us live our lives.

Such, I believe, has been my experience. I have never "met" or "encountered" God as some religious people claim to have done, but I believe I have had moments when I understood what "people meant by God" and, finding totally irreligious people singularly dull in what they find in human existence, I believe I have found enough to stay with the religious journey.

That my story is "not Catholic enough" for others, is something I can also understand. I have worried myself that I might still "feel" like a Catholic while not being a Catholic at all. I do not, however, believe that is true. What is certainly true, is that I have found myself increasingly distanced from "official" Catholicism and that I have found myself redefining "belief" within the context of belief. But I am convinced a theological case can be made for that redefinition, however unusual it may be by "official" or "magisterial" standards.

In the end, however, I do not think argument about all this gets us very far. I prefer to mull over Zen-like passages such as this of Nikos Kazantzakis:

"I said to the almond tree,
'Sister, speak to me of God'
And the almond tree blossomed."

Not much of an argument. No proof. But just enough to get started and perhaps enough to keep us on the lifelong search for "God's" true name.

Buddhist Institutional Structures and the Role of the State in Sri Lanka

This year marks the 23rd centenary of the arrival of Dhammapala, the Buddhist missionary sent to Sri Lanka by Asoka. Since he achieved the conversion of the king and his chief counsellors, Buddhism and its social teachings became the basic inspiration for the socio-political harmony of the Ceylonese people. The European colonial powers who tried to impose the Western Christian culture failed completely to inspire the people and unify the nation. The gaining of independence was only a beginning in the line of restoring the lost values, and there is a long way to go.

The year 1993 is marked with a religious significance for Sri Lankans on account of the arrival of Arahant Mahinda, the emissary of Emperor Asoka, from India 2,300 years ago¹. The event is recognized as a water-shed in the long history of the great island-nation at the southern tip of India. Mahinda's arrival had a lasting impact on the Sri Lankan society: the birth of qualitatively new socio-political, Buddhist structures and institutions coloured by the influence of the doctrine of Sri Buddha². The political history of Buddhism in Sri Lanka is a test case of the influence of a specific religious tradition in the shaping of a society. The aim of this paper is to underline the relationship between State and Buddhist institutional structures and advocate that a healthy understanding of this feature is vital for political stability and economic prosperity, particularly among small religions, in a multi-religious Sri Lankan polity.

- 1 This paper is written to mark the 2,300th anniversary of the arrival of Arahant Mahinda in Sri Lanka. Celebrations were organised to commemorate this historic occasion under State patronage.
- 2 An authoritative comment on Mahinda's advent: "The advent opens up a new era and the history of the island after this event is much more reliable than before..." Adikaram, E. W. (1953). *Early History of Buddhism in Ceylon*, M. D. Gunasena, Colombo, 2nd ed. p. 43.

I. The Origin and Development

The arrival of Arahant Mahinda in Sri Lanka occurred during the reign of King Devananmpiya Tissa (247-207 BCE)³. This king maintained friendly and cordial relations with King Asoka of India; and in fact the advent of Mahinda was a natural outcome of this friendly relationship. The historic meeting with the emissary took place in the north-central region of Sri Lanka, in Anuradhapura, the first capital of the nation. The precise location is known as Mihintale, which eventually became a place of pilgrimage, where thousands of devotees gather annually, in the month of June, to commemorate the great event.

Scholars believe that though Buddhist religious institutions originated and evolved in the post-Mahindian era, there is evidence to prove that Buddhism had been in practice at a rudimentary level prior to the event, particularly at a time when there was continuous interaction among several religious groups in the Indian sub-continent⁴. Mahinda's arrival was an official endorsement of the possibility of spreading and inculcating the teachings of Buddha. The Head of the State, the King, accepted as his duty to provide support to the propagation of Buddhist doctrines. After the very first discourse of Mahinda (culahatthipadopama sutta), approximately 40,000 people, including the king embraced Buddhism. Buddhism which has been hitherto practised "in a private capacity" has now been transformed as "a formal and public declaration of faith"⁵. Mahinda spent seven days converting the multitude of people to the faith and helped them to achieve the realization of truth. Mahinda's sister Sangamitta was invited to Ceylon to establish the order of the Buddhist sister-hood, the Bikkuni Sasana (Buddhist nuns). She

3 Ibid, p. 43. Adikaram affirms : "There existed strong ties of friendship and affection between Devanampiya Tissa and Dhammasoka though they had not seen each other. The former sent many precious jewels as gifts to Asoka. The latter sent to Tissa five ensigns of royalty necessary for the consecration". The best gift Asoka sent was the message of Dhamma: "I have taken refuge in the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha, and I have declared myself a lay disciple in the religion of the Son of the Sakyas. Take delight even thou, in these three, in the Supreme Religion of the conqueror, and come to the Refuge with faith".

4 Multiple Schools of thoughts were in existence in India during time of the Buddha, which could have spread to the neighbouring States.

5 Adikaram, E. W., (1953), *op. cit.*, p. 47 and 51.

brought with her a branch of the Bodhi Tree under which the Buddha attained Enlightenment, and it was planted in Anuradhapura with a religious ceremony. The Buddhists in Ceylon regard the tree with immense reverence even today.

When all this was done the King Devanampiya Tissa asked Mahinda whether the Law of the Buddhasasana was fully established in the island kingdom. To this question Mahinda answered: "Sasana is established, but it has not taken root". The king inquired when and how it would take root. The reply was: "When a person born of parents who belong to Tambapannidipa, enters pabbajja in Tambapannidipa, learns the vinaya in Tambapannidipa and recites the same in Tambapannidipa, then will the sasana take root in the land"⁶. The meaning of this statement is that the buddhist church (sasana) is already planted but it "will take root only when a person born of Ceylonese parents in Ceylon, studies the *Vinaya* (disciplinary rules) in Ceylon and expounds the *Vinaya* in Ceylon"⁷. This responsibility was entrusted to Arittha Thera who was on par with Mahinda Thera's spiritual development. This story reveals Mahinda's intention that the Buddhist institutional structures needed to be maintained not by teachers from abroad, but by native people themselves.

The king and the people, therefore, took a great deal of interest in the survival, growth, defense and expansion of Buddhism in Ceylon. The three eminent persons who greatly contributed to the birth of Buddhist institutional structures were King Devanampiya Tissa, Mahinda Thera and Sangamitta Thera, all of whom passed away in Ceylon and their obsequies were performed with national honours. Their efforts reaped "the harvest of spirituality, charity and loving kindness to fellow-beings" and "their names have been held in veneration by a grateful people to the present day, and will continue to be so held for many generations to come"⁸.

The propagation of the doctrine of the Buddha in Ceylon and its subsequent expansion all over the country was facilitated by the royal patronage provided by Devanampiya Tissa. He was

6 *Ibid.*, p. 56.

7 Ray, H. C. (ed.) 1959. *History of Ceylon*, vol. 1, part 1, Ceylon University Press: University of Ceylon, Colombo, p. 143.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 143.

influenced and motivated, in this missionary effort, by Emperor Asoka of India, the son of king Bindusara. Asoka's coronation took place 218 years after Buddha's death. Early in his rule Asoka was called "Canda", the wicked, owing to his ruthless military conquests especially of Kalinga, in which hundreds of thousands of people were killed or captured. After witnessing the horrors of war, Asoka embraced Buddhism and adopted a complete reversal of the policy he had hitherto followed. In fact, as is disclosed by his famous Rock edicts and inscriptions, he adopted the Buddhist ideal of a çakravartin, an emperor, who conquers the earth without the use of force through *dhammavijaya* (victory by religious truths). He tried to inculcate in his officials and subjects values that guarantee happiness in this world: to earn one's living by hard work (uttana-sampadawa), to protect the wealth thus earned by eschewing alcohol and gambling (arakka sampadawa), to associate with trustworthy friends (kalyanamitrathawa), to lead a balanced life according to one's needs and abilities (samjivitatavaya). He was certain that in order to enrich one's life after it was essential to cultivate faithfulness to: 1) the three jewels of Buddha, Dhamma and Samgha (shadha sampadawa); 2) pleasant moral life (silasampadawa); 3) practising concentration (samadhisampadawa) and 4) achieving wisdom (pragnasampadawa).

Asoka introduced a method of administration which ensured peace and harmony, law and order, prosperity and security. He distributed medical aid, planted trees to conserve the ecology for all living beings, prevented torture and killing of all beings, respected all religious beliefs with tolerance, built viharas and stupas in cities and villages, and shared royal wealth with the members of the samgha. He resolved the disputes among the samgha by convening the Third Council after Buddha's passing away, in which decision was taken by Maggaliputta Tissa Thera to send missionaries to Sri Lanka and other countries with whom Asoka had established diplomatic relations.

Buddhism from its very beginning had a well developed political thought, since Siddartha Gautama came from the royalty of the Sakya clan. It defined principles of political and social conduct. Buddhism created a civilization which held up a well defined model of what a worthy human being should be: an ideal worthy of imitation by both king and beggar. The task of

the monks was to provide society with an object lesson in right living. This is the reason why Buddhism placed great emphasis on the discipline of the monks and gave detailed rules for their conduct. Rules for the laity were only slightly mitigated adaptations of the monks' rules. The ideal found full expression in the charity, courage and wisdom of the Samgha, and the laity emulated them as best as they could. The production of wealth for social use instead of individual profit, the measuring of an individual in terms of his moral stature and true wisdom and not of his economic power, and of the nation's greatness in terms of the peace and prosperity of its inhabitants and not solely in terms of its balance of trade—these were some of the values embodied in the Buddhist ideal of character.

Hence wherever Buddhism exerted its influence, especially in Sri Lanka, the Samgha and kingship were closely interdependent. Samgha's sanction and recognition of Buddhist kings were reciprocated by the protection and promotion from the king's part of the Buddha Sasana. Buddhism and political authority were correlated in prosperity and adversity: Approval of the king by the Samgha assured public support and created social stability, and the maintenance of the Buddhist ideals of life depended very much on their enforcement by the king. Both the Theravada and Mahayana texts expressed clear views on the origin, nature, location, objective, administration and change of political authority, conceived generally as kingship. Thus Anguttara Nikaya describes the seven things that lead to political prosperity: "So long as the monks shall be often assembled, much in assembly, growth may be expected, not decline; so long as they shall sit down in concord, rise up in concord, do business in concord; shall not decree the undecreed, nor repeal the decreed, but conform to the decreed training; shall honour, respect, venerate, revere the elders, monks of experience, long gone forth;... shall not fall into the power of craving's surge, the cause of renewed becoming; shall cleave to the forest bed and seat; shall each in himself make mindfulness stand up, and it shall be known that pious men in godly fellowship may come there from abroad and that those there dwell in comfort—growth may be expected, not decline".

Devanampiya Tissa, who received Asoka's emissary Mahinda,

passed way in 197 BCE. His successors⁹ however, continued his erstwhile efforts to see that Buddhism was strongly rooted in the soil of Sri Lanka. The eminent persons who contributed to the development of the Buddhist church were Uttiya (207-197 BCE), Mahasiva (197-187 BCE,) Suratissa (187-177 BCE). Later invasions from South India began, and with the rule of the Tamil king Elara (145-101 BCE,) a decline in Buddhism began to appear. The samgha moved from Anuradhapura, the capital, to the region of Rohana, which became the new centre of Buddhist activities. But during the reign of Dutthagamini (101-77 BCE) Anuradhapura regained its lost prestige as the centre of Buddhism, and Saddha Tissa (77-59 BCE) who succeeded his brother, continued to make Buddhism prosperous. As Adikaram has stated: One may without much fear of contradiction say that it is in the time of these two brothers that the island of Lanka witnessed the zenith of Buddhist glory¹⁰. "The laymen comprising the kings, the nobility and common folk considered it their bounden duty to help the monks by bestowing on them food, clothes and other requisites and monks in turn considered it their duty to instruct and enlighten the laity in matters spiritual pertaining to this life and to the hereafter"¹¹. Many joined the samgha and took up a monastic way of life. Great many thupas and monasteries were established and great many people attained a higher level of spiritual consciousness, and enabled to understand and know the nature and function of the mind. Monasteries and viharas accommodated great many bhikkus, who maintained a routine time table to lead a saintly life.

Monastic life of the bhikkus deeply influenced the life of the laity. The salient features of the life were: 1) protection of every living being through legal means; 2) elimination of the

9 Yoshiko Ashiwa analyses the concept of Buddhist King and its impact on the governance in Sri Lanka since Independence. See her paper "Absent King and the Buddhist State", 4th Sri Lanka Studies Conference, SLFI, Colombo, 10-13 August 1993. For a list of Kings of Sri Lanka in the chronological order, see, Walpola Rahula's *History of Buddhism in Ceylon: The Anuradhapura period, 3rd Cent. BC- 10th Cent. AD*, M.D. Gunasena: Colombo, 1956, Appendix 111, p. 308, and G. C. Mendis, *The Early History of Ceylon*, Asian Education Service, New Delhi, Appendix 1, p. 83.

10 *Op. cit.*, Adikaram, E. W. (1953), p. 72.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 125.

evils of the caste system such as untouchability; 3) suppression of all kinds of slavery; and, 4) friendly attitude towards the bhikkus. Another consequence was the growth of popular devotion and ritual, veneration of cetiyas, sanctuaries on which relics of Buddha were deposited, and of the Bodhi trees. Along with these there arose also observance of great many festivals at which offerings or pujas were made, and the recitation of paritta or protection suttas to free people from plagues and evil spirits. Monks were invited to recite.

II. Decline and reform

Dhulathana (59 BCE) Lan Jatissa (59-50 BCE) Khallatanaga (50-43 BCE) and Vattagamini (43 BCE) came as rulers in succession, and during this period there were several invasions by Indian Tamils. To this political turmoil were added severe famine for fourteen years. Hence Buddhism declined, monks and lay people died of starvation and monasteries were abandoned. Though in 29 BCE Vattagamini returned to power and was followed by great many rulers, like Mahaveli Mahatissa (17-03 BCE), Kuttakanna Tissa (16-38 CE), Bhatika Abhaya (38-66 CE), Mahadhatika Mahanaga (67-79 CE), Amandagamini Abhaya (79-89 CE), Vasabha (127-171 CE), Gajabahu (174-196 CE), and good many mediocre rulers, so that finally in the middle of the fifth century during the reign of Mahanama (409-431 CE) there was chaos in all spheres of life for almost twenty five years. This breakdown of the political order followed very much the prediction of the Buddha himself: "How will the gradual decline of Buddha Sasana occur?" Buddha is asked, and he replies: "After my decease there will first be five disappearances, of the Buddha dhamma, of proper conduct, of learning, of its outward form, and of the relics... The disappearance of proper conduct means that, being unable to practise jhana, insight, the ways and the fruits, they will guard no more the four entire purities of moral habit".

But King Dhatusena (460-478 CE) liberated the country from the foreign rulers, and initiated many progressive measures comprising agrarian economy, construction of viharas, tanks, provision of facilities to monks and the reestablishment of Buddha Sasana. His successors attempted the restoration of the political order mostly by the restoration of Buddha Sasana, the

recital of sacred texts in order to purify the Sasana and to determine the genuine teaching of the Buddha. Thus Sitakala (524-537 CE) emphasized the social dimension of Buddhism: Do not kill; care for the sick; observe religious activities in common and the like. But slowly the prominence of Anuradhapura as the capital of Ceylon declined and was replaced by Polonnaruwa as the seat of government on account of its strategic location. Agabodhi VII (766-722 CE) who became the first king permanently resident at Polonnaruwa, started by "purifying the sasanas". The role of the ruler was briefly stated as "repairing and restoring old religious buildings, holding festivals, providing requisites for monks"¹². The kings showed their continued dedication and commitment to the people by the reinforcement of the Buddhist Church.

Pononnaruwa Period (1017-1235) began after Udaya II, some of whose successors were Kassapa IV (896-913 CE) Kassapa V (913-923), Dappula (924-935), Udaya IV (946-954) and Mahinda V (982-1029). In 1017 Cholas from South India conquered Ceylon, and the Chola rule which lasted till 1070 did everything to destroy the Buddhist tradition. Vijayabahu I (1070-1114 CE) defeated the Cholas and ruled over the whole island till 1114. At this time Buddhist samgha was in great decline and the ruler had to request the help of Buddhist monks from Burma to perform the Buddhist ceremonies. Soon Sinhalese, in increasing numbers were admitted to the Order, and "the Samgha became again competent both in numbers and learning to resume its position in the religious life of the people"¹³. Among the successors of Vijayabahu, Prakramabahu (1137-1186) was praised as a "warrior statesman and benefactor of Buddhism". He attempted a restoration of the Buddhist ideals in politics: According to C. W. Nicholas, 'First of all he bestowed offices according to worth on those who deserved the royal favour. Then he held a great almsgiving and distribution of gifts. Next he cleansed the religious Order, which had been corrupt, and established uniform, orthodox practice; expelled hundreds of sinful

12 *Ibid.*, Rahula, W., (1956), p. 104.

13 Ray H. C. (ed.), (1960), *History of Ceylon*, vol. 1, part 11, Ceylon University Press: University of Ceylon, Colombo, p. 430.

monks, united the three fraternities into a single *nikaya*, caused new monasteries to be built, and made provision for the spiritual and material needs of the *samgha*¹⁴. Under Vijayabahu II, the nephew of Prakramabahu, the Sinhalese greatness reached its zenith. King Nissankmalla's contribution to the rise of Buddhism deserves praise. Then it declined rapidly and under the rule of Mogha of Kalinga, described as heretic, an unfavourable attitude was assumed towards Buddhism and the Polannaruwa civilization came to an end. The capital of Ceylon shifted in chronological order, from Dambadeniya, Yapahuwa, Kurunegala, Gampola, Raigama and Katte. These locations were chosen partly to satisfy the need for security, due to threats stemmed from South India. Ceylon was divided into three kingdoms: the Kandyan, the Kotte and the Jaffna. Prakramabahu VIII ruled Kotte (1484-1508) when the first European arrived. Then followed a period of great uncertainty: "Without royal authority to back them up the leaders of the *samgha* were unable to prevent undesirable persons doning the yellow robe... leading dissolute lives so as to bring the venerable Order into disrepute"¹⁵.

III. Buddhism in the Colonial Period (1505-1948)

During the 450 years from the arrival of the Portuguese and the gaining of national independence there were three distinct styles of relation between religion and political administration in Sri Lanka. It was on November 15, 1505 that Dom Lorencio do Almeida gained access to Ceylon. The Portuguese first, then the Dutch and finally the British adopted different methods of approach to the religion of the Sinhalese.

1. The Portuguese Influence (1505-1658): "The Portuguese caught Sinhalese civilization when it was already fast disintegrating."¹⁶ Gone were the glories of Anuradhapura, and the great shrines of former times had been covered over by jungles. In a way the arrival of the Portuguese arrested the decline of the Sinhalese culture and created a certain political unity. Apparently they followed the policy almost universally prevalent at the time, "Whose region, his religion", and gave preference to missionary

14 *Ibid.* p. 461.

15 *Ibid.*, p. 745.

16 Farmer, B. H. (1963), *Ceylon: A Divided Nation*, Oxford University Press: London, p. 17.

Christianity over the decadent Buddhism. But there was a great difference between the religious zeal of the Buddhist kings and the religious policy of the Portuguese. As Arasaratnam has stated, "spices and Christians were what they had come to the East for"¹⁷. In their quest for profit in the trade of spices and political power, they made religion a political tool and expected the "missionary" minded Christian clergy to play the role of a hand-maid. That is why it has been stated that they looked for Christians even before they could get at the spices.

The first missionary activities began in 1543, by the Franciscans under Joao de Vila de Conde with the establishment of a church in response to the invitation of the king of Colle, Bhavanekabahu VII. Under the tolerant policy of the Sinhalese king conversion work was undertaken in the coastal areas. There was more success in the North than in the South. The conversion in 1557 of king Dharmapala into Catholicism and the change of his name into Dom Joao Periyar Bandara led to the rise of Catholics and decline of Buddhism. By the end of the 16th century Franciscans were superceded by the Jesuits, Dominicans, Augustinians and Benedictines. It is said that "extensive lands belonging to Buddhist and Hindu temples were confiscated and given to the Catholic orders"¹⁸.

The first Church Council held at Goa in 1567 articulated the basic principle for the propagation of Christian faith, and it was decided that the same principles could be applied also to Ceylon: Worship pertaining to other religions was not permitted within the Portuguese territory. Christianity became attractive to the Buddhists because of the state patronage according to which preference was given to Christians in the appointment to the important offices. The Buddhist nobility was quick to succumb to such incentives and the landed aristocracy became Christian taking Portuguese names like Fernando, de Silva, de Andrade, Pieris and de Costa. Conversion work went fast especially in the fishing villages. Though it is debatable whether there were any forced conversions, there was plenty of indirect inducement such as the prohibition of public practice of Buddhism and Hinduism, destruction of non-Christian institutions, and economic

17 Arasaratnam, S., (1964), *Ceylon*, Prentice Hall: New Jersey, p. 134.

18 *Ibid.*, p. 135

consequences. It is alleged that famous Buddhist temples were destroyed and Christian churches built in their place. Buddhist priests fled to the region of Kandy. According to Tikiri Abeyasinghe¹⁹ the main reason for the collapse of Buddhism was the inextricable relationship that existed between the Sinhalese monarchy and the Buddhist religion, particularly "the royal initiative and aid", for the purification of the samgha was absent. The second was the absence of any significant opposition to the Portuguese at the level of the State, while the opposition was directed only to the religious realm. He concludes: "The really valid criticism against the Portuguese is not that they failed to find out what the customs were, but that after having recorded them, they ignored them and violated them."²⁰

2. The Dutch Influence (1658-1796): The Portuguese phase came to an end when the Kandyan kings dismayed with the Portuguese policy, decided to drive them out and in effect, solicited the cooperation of the Dutch, to whom a monopoly in all major articles of trade, were granted. The Dutch were only too eager to enter into alliances with Asian kings to defeat the Portuguese. The Portuguese were finally expelled in 1658. The Dutch, however, were able to establish their influence only in the low-country wet Zone of the Kandyan kingdom like Galle, Matara, Jaffna and Mannar. The main concern of the Dutch was to replace the Catholic Christian values of the Portuguese with their own Protestantism. For this they prohibited the practice of Catholicism and prevented the entry of Catholic priests into Ceylon. But the Catholics in India undertook clandestine ministry in Ceylon, smuggling Indian priests like Joseph Vas into Dutch territories. Though the Dutch endeavoured to establish Protestantism through their educational institutions, producing teachers and catechists, they were more tolerant of other religions, leaving them mostly undisturbed especially in villages.

By the end of the 18th century the Kandyan kingdom was reduced to "an anachronistic remnant of sinhalese power"²¹.

19 Abeyasingha, T., (1966), *Portuguese in Rule in Ceylon: 1594 -- 1612*, Lake House: Colombo, p. 192.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 226.

21 Arasaratnam, S. (1964), *op. cit.*, p. 147.

Economically, the lucrative resources were drained by the Dutch. By 1747 the direct Sinhalese royal line died out, and there existed great rivalries between the low-country Sinhalese and the high-country Sinhalese. The former, the land-owning class were more receptive to Western culture, and thus divided the sinhalese of Ceylon into two culturally different categories.

3. The British Influence (1796-1948): The British owing to their grand designs for the whole Indian sub-continent and the strategic importance of the Trincomalee harbour, were eager to step into the shoes of the Dutch. Though for this they made several overtures to the king of Kandy, their final entry into Ceylon occurred on February 14, 1815 when Sri Wickrama Rajasingha was deposed and exiled to Madras. On March 2, 1815 at a convention held in Kandy between the British governor and the Kandyan chiefs, the British guaranteed the rights of the chiefs and declared that the Buddhist religion so vital a part of the Sinhalese tradition will be maintained²². But when a rebellion broke out in 1817 the British showed that they had very little sympathy for the influence of Buddhism in politics. With the construction of roads and highways connecting Kandy with Kurunegala and Colombo, Kandy itself lost its prominence, and the Kandyan kingdom was integrated to the rest of the country in administration. In 1829 according to the recommendations of a commission of inquiry led by WMG Colebrooks and C. H. Cameron the financial and judicial administration of the Kandyan kingdom was placed directly under the British Agent along with that of the rest of the island, all distinction in culture between the low and up countries Sinhalese was ignored. Further the culture of the Kandyan territory was deeply affected by the advent of the Indian Plantation Community brought by the British to work in the tea estates.

It is stated that the Goygama (the upper caste) segment of the people remained faithful to Buddhism, while the lower caste groups (Karava) were converted to Christianity — Christianity was to all appearance 'the government religion'. This naturally led to various repercussions: firstly, the Karava people and the aristocratic families accepted Christianity; secondly,

22 Farmer, B. H. (1963), *op. cit.*, p. 35.

educational institutions were managed by Christian Missionary foundations; thirdly, there arose an elite (English speaking) class "familiar with the social and political thinking of the West"²³.

IV. Buddhist Nationalist Revivalism

But the situation of domination by Western culture naturally led to a Buddhist and Hindu revival, which originated and developed in the second half of the nineteenth century. Ironically this revival was greatly helped by western philologists who took an interest in Eastern languages, and comparative religionists who were fascinated by the unique characteristics of both Buddhism and Hinduism. By 1860 Buddhist "priests" began to organize a counter missionary work. In 1880 the Buddhist Theosophical Society was established, which initiated a vigorous controversy between Christians and the revivalists, specifically on language and literature with obvious religious implications. Such interest groups were easily integrated into the national movement fighting against the British rule. The different trends that came to the surface at this time revealed the development of the political commitment on the part of the local leaders. They agitated against the political system in which the British Governor was the head of the state with executive and legislative powers, and an advisory council consisting of the highest colonial officials. All top government offices were given to members of a civil service system recruited and specially trained to serve the Crown. This foreign rule had a very serious adverse impact on the language and religious culture of the people. The Christian missionary effort was mostly concentrated on education. The London Missionary Society (1805), the Baptists (1812), the Wesleyan Methodists (1814), the Church Mission (1818) are some of the groups who entered the scene and with full support of the government tried to provide for the people the same educational support which the ancient Buddhist kings had given to inspire and organize them.

The movement against the British rule adopted two strategies: one nationalist, and the other constitutionalist, both dominated by an elite that enjoyed prestige and influence in society. The activities of the first group concentrated on Buddhist revivalism

such as the temperance movement, while the latter focussed attention on the development of a constitution, which should guarantee more representation and responsibility for the people in the government. The nationalists, with their charismatic leader Anagarika Dharmapala, created public opinion concerning religious, social, cultural and educational issues. However they lacked the political will to achieve these objectives, though Dharmapala spoke often about the need for 'swaraj' or self-rule. They lacked also institutional structures to realize their goals. The British were more accommodative to the constitutionalists who were generally anglicized and generally followed conservative ideals than to the nationalists for their pro-Buddhist sentiments. So the constitutionalists succeeded in taking over the government from the British on February 4, 1948. The first Prime Minister of independent Ceylon was D. S. Senanayake who formed the political party now in power, the United National Party (UNP). The new government in assuming power promised to adhere to and continue the values and tradition introduced by the British. Mr. S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike and a number of cabinet members, however, took a totally different option to leave the UNP and form a new party, called the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) which would fulfill the needs and aspirations of the indigenous population in religion, language and national identity, and became the chief opposition party to the UNP government²⁴. This opposition Party gained power by organizing the five chief segments of the population, the monks, the native physicians, the rural teachers, the peasant farmers, and the urban workers. In the after-math of Prime Minister Bandaranaike's untimely death, the realization of the proclaimed goals were continued relentlessly by Mrs. Bandaranaike's governments. It is being argued: "Mrs. Bandaranaike, by accepting the leadership of the SLFP in May, 1960 became the true heir to this political and social message of 1956" (p. 270)²⁵. However, the UNP government led by the former President J. R. Jayewardene in July, 1977 ushered

24 See in Wiswa Warnapala, W. A. (1993), *The Sri Lankan Political Scene, Navrang*: New Delhi, Ch. 14., 'Sinhala Nationalism in Independent Sri Lanka: Aspects of a Religio-Nationalist Movement', pp. 213-230.

25 *Ibid.*, Ch., 16., 'Mrs Sirimavo Bandaranaike and her Role in Parliamentary Politics', pp. 267-281.

in an era, relatively inimical to the traditions of the ancient Ceylonese Monarchs. It has been convincingly stated: "Though the massive electoral victory of the UNP in July, 1977 indicated the political maturity of the Sri Lankan electorate, it failed to create the requisites for the effective functioning of the parliamentary system of government" (p. 146)²⁶.

The former President Ranasinghe Premadasa who succeeded Jayawardene in December, 1989 endeavoured to achieve the goal of restoring Buddhist values in national life. It outrightly failed not only due to his untimely death but also for a multiplicity of reasons, the chief of which is that "the Sri Lankan political system, which in the course of its evolution in the last fifty years... is now fast becoming an authoritarian polity" (p. 282)²⁷.

Conclusion

The political history of Ceylon since the arrival of Arahant Mahinda is a typical example of the dynamics of religious influence in the evolution of a people. The tragedy of the colonial period is the injection of a colonial culture, though inspired to a great extent by Christianity, without sufficient appreciation of the cultural heritage of Buddhism. *The need of the hour for Sri Lanka is that it should regain its soul inspired by the Buddhist values.* For the achievement of this objective it is imperative to generate enthusiasm for greater cooperation and understanding among the four major religious groups existing in the country, since this is in the tolerant spirit of Buddhism itself, which constantly exhorted all people to treat religions other than one's own as dimensions of one's own faith. *There is no need to deny Buddhism the dominant role it played in the life of the people*, provided it does not antagonize other religions. There is need of a deeper awareness and broader knowledge of other faiths through a comparative study of religions.

26 *Ibid.*, Ch. 10., 'UNP Victory fails to stem decline: Absence of effective Parliamentary Opposition', pp. 146-163.

27 *Ibid.*, Ch. 17., 'Authoritarianism in Sri Lanka', pp. 282-299. see also J. Vander Host's paper "Presidency and Models of Kingship", 4th Sri Lanka Studies Conference, SLFI, Colombo, 10-13 August, 1993, for an analysis of President Premadasa's attempt to restore Buddhism *Vis a vis* the ancient Kings.

The contemporary scholars in the Third World have remarkably highlighted the significance of dialogue among various religions²⁸. John B. Chethimattam has pointed out that "inter-religious dialogue is gasping for breath today" because it has degenerated into a search for the lowest common denominator among religions without emphasizing the identity and unique message as well as specific contribution of each of them. When everyone of them is saying the same thing and all are considered as different rivers flowing into the same ocean, or different paths leading to the same summit, there is no scope for dialogue among them. What the history of the impact of the Portuguese, the Dutch and the British on the Sinhalese people clearly points out, is that these were neither able to ring a responsive chord in the hearts of people nor answer their basic problems. As Paul Knitter has pointed out, interreligious dialogue has to start from the recognition "that no religion has the final answer or the last word for all the others". Though each major religion provides a comprehensive answer to the ultimate existential questions of human life, it is after all a human formulation of the inexpressible reality of faith²⁹.

Interreligious dialogue should focus attention on national unity and temporal prosperity while clearly distinguishing these objectives from the specific transcendental perspectives of the different religions. In any community, the capacity for public discussion and political collaboration are vital capital resources for getting things done. People who concentrate on their theoretical views regarding transcendental realities often pollute the socio-political atmosphere. The peace and vitality of the community depends greatly on "civility", the treatment that citizens owe to one another simply as fellow citizens. This civility is built up through centuries of customs and traditions in which the dominant religion of the country plays a significant role. So the first task of interreligious dialogue is to see that the theoretical differences among religions do not affect the solid cultural basis for human relationships provided by the major religion of the country. To this basic social harmony and peace

28 Chethimattam, J. B. 'Nature and Scope of Inter-religious Dialogue Today', *Jeevadhara*, vol. XXII, no. 131, pp 331-355.

29 *Ibid.*, p. 344.

provided by the major religious tradition of the country can be further strengthened by other religions through their own specific input into national life. The State and the majority religion of the State, on the other hand, should recognize the identities and specific messages of the other religions, and reflect on ways of devising strategies to its national interests. The other small religions are obliged to discern the national interests of Sri Lanka so that they may be developed. and safeguarded.

The valuable public asset of open conversation regarding things people share and have to use in common is protected through three systems of enforcement, laws prohibiting the violation of one's rights, moral standards enforceable by the weight of public opinion and custom which enforces the canons of etiquette and social relations. In all these matters Buddhism has provided a solid basis for social interaction and political accommodation, and the other religions have only to build on that foundation.

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Mervyn Ananda

Discussion Forum

Rejoinder from R. S. Kulkarni to J. B. Chethimattam (p. 364)*

Dear Dr. Chethimattam,

I was again very much impressed by your illuminating speech at the luncheon meeting on Sunday, July 18th. If I understand you correctly, you are advocating a sort of universally acceptable religion. Considering what is happening all over the world, and especially in India, such an understanding is very much needed. The intellectuals should play an active role in bringing about such understanding. The Christians of Indian origin and Hindus are perhaps in a most favorable position to contribute to this endeavour. For first of all both communities are deeply interested in religion. Also both communities have highly educated members, who are fairly open-minded. So if some broad common understanding about the nature of religion emerges in these two communities, it may have larger repercussions. We do not wish to merely list the similarities and contrasts between Hindu Religion and Christianity, and end up with advocating tolerance of different traditions. Tolerance is surely better than a fight, but it does not indicate understanding. If we wish to remove divisiveness at its roots, then we must try to arrive at a more fundamental understanding of what religion is about.

I would like to share some of my thoughts with you. As you well know, I am pretty much a novice in this area. So I am essentially approaching you as a student approaches a professor ! Being a scientist, I would like to approach this subject as much scientifically as possible. In particular, this would involve

* The July 18th meeting of the Society of Indian Academics of America was specially arranged to honor Dr. Chethimattam, a professor emeritus of Philosophy and Religion at Fordham University. In his second invited speech at the SIAA luncheon meeting, Dr. Chethimattam again made a cogent appeal for interreligious understanding

Motivated by his two illuminating speeches, I have written the following letter. This is a topic worthy of further dialogue, and there is also a sense of urgency about it, as it deals with the issues of diversity and multiculturalism.

first collecting and analyzing data on existing religions, and trying to separate its "rational content" as much as possible. This should not deter us from taking philosophical stands on "transcendental" aspects of religions, but we shall carefully note the distinction between the rational and the transcendental aspects, and clearly acknowledge where our subjective judgments have entered.

There is one aspect in such discussions which must be kept in mind. I would like to express it in mathematical terms, for they are at once both succinct and precise. Namely, *a fundamental dilemma in all communication is that our communication has to be necessarily linear whereas our experience is multi-dimensional*. One may draw a single process of communication by a line with several dots on it.

This is supposed to indicate, that in communication first we need to make one point, then connect it to another point, then to the third point... and so on. On the other hand one may picture our "multi-dimensional experience" by a sort of Euclidean plane.

The plane is never a finite union of lines. So in some sense one can never communicate one's experience "in totality" by words or other gestures. But this should not be a cause for despair. For one can fairly approximate the plane by a rectangular grid.

This is supposed to indicate that one can present certain salient points, and their interconnections. If both minds are turned to one another then they can well "fill" the empty spaces, and a good communication takes place.

For a communication to start, it is extremely important that one starts with *definitions*. This aspect is obvious to a scientist. This greatly helps in focussing a discussion. But I think, it was Voltaire, who was fed up with a lot of empty and incoherent talk in humanities and social sciences, and insisted, "Gentlemen, first define your terms!" The definitions may be tentative. After further discussions one may even change them.

So to start with, let me define "Religion" to mean i) a code of ethics, together with a code of conduct, and ii) a system explaining the nature of life and death and nature of consciousness.

This is close to what you said in your lecture in answer to my question. It is also close to the writings of Shankara such as at the beginning of his commentary on Gita. I shall be obliged if you could comment on this definition, in particular, if you think that this still misses some important aspect which must be included in the concept of Religion. In this letter, I

shall stick to this definition. Also I am deliberately going to be brief. What follows is like a synopsis of a "term-paper". I would like to get your comprehensive comments, and I shall appreciate if you could provide further references. Only after doing some further reading and thinking, I would like to turn to a "descriptive mode".

The examples of codes of ethics are the *Ten Commandments* in the Jewish religion, or the *Eightfold Way* of Buddha. One may also refer to the *Yamas and Niyamas* in the Patanjali's *Yoga*, where certain ethical principles are presented with incisive understanding that they form the beau-ideals for humanity transcending sect, place, and time. Similarly in *Upanishads* and *Gita* at various places, e. g., in the 13th, 16th, and 18th cantos of *Gita* we find similar codes. It is probably agreeable to you that in Christianity, the *Ten Commandments* together with their significant modifications by Jesus as indicated in the New Testament may be considered as forming a Christian code of ethics.

One readily sees that there is a great similarity among these codes despite their varied interpretations. For example, most recorded religions point out 1) Ahimsa, (Non-violence, or "Thou shalt not kill"), 2) Indriya-nigraha, (Sense-control, "Thou shalt not commit adultery"), 3) Asteya, ("Thou shalt not steal"), (4) Satya, (Truth, "Thou shalt not bear false witness"), 5) Prema, Love for God, friendship for all living beings, and compassion, for those in distress — Jesus reduced all other commandments to this one, as ethical principles. Also one of the *Ten Commandments*, namely "Thou shalt honor thy father and mother" comes close to the *Taittiriya Upanishadic* injunction "Matrudevo bhava, Pitru devo bhava, Acharyadevo bhava".

One can discern a deepening of interpretation of the *Ten Commandments* and a further clarity of thought as one passes from the Old to the New Testament, and a similar deepening of interpretation of the ethical principles and further clarity as one passes from the *Vedas* to *Upanishads*, and then to *Vedanta* and *Yoga*. Their actual practice varies from time to time and place to place. For example, for some, Ahimsa or "Thou shalt not kill", implies vegetarianism, but some others may not agree. Another interesting development is that now in most countries bigamy is illegal. But while all scriptures would certainly talk about sense-control as an ethical principle, and many men and women of religion perform an essentially psychiatric service of providing understanding of the *libido*, as far as I know, no scripture has specifically derived monogamy as its explicit corollary.

To enforce its code of ethics each religion suggests a certain code of conduct. These include certain fasts and feasts

at the festivals coming periodically, and prayers on a weekly or daily basis. Islam has beautifully perfected the prayer-aspect in *Namaz* done five times a day. Similarly there are weekly group-prayers in Jewish synagogues and Christian churches. There is *Trikala Sandhya* prescribed for Hindus. Also there are certain prescribed rites commemorating the important events in one's life, such as birth, starting education, becoming adult and a responsible member of the community, marriage, birth of a child, death, prayers for the departed near-ones etc... Helping the community, especially helping the poor, overall philanthropy, supporting the church or temple are also an integral part of the codes of conduct. This is further extended into a prescribed community service for the young. The Jewish religion and Christianity seem to have perfected this aspect best. The medical institutions set up by the Christian missionaries have provided valuable services in remote corners of the globe. It is also a very valuable experience for a young person to devote 2 or 3 years of his or her life learning another language, culture, people ... I have been especially impressed by the devotion of some of the young people I have met from the Mormon Church. There are similar traditions in the religion propounded by Buddha. In the Hindu tradition this aspect is surely there, but it is much less formally organized. However it is not a news that wherever Hindus go, the first social work they undertake is building a temple! Also Hindu temples often serve as places of rest for travellers where payment is entirely voluntary, and where the poor are fed freely. The theory of the four *Purusharthas* namely, *Dharma, Artha, Kama, and Moksha* provides a rational basis for the codes of conduct, but in the Hindu tradition, the details of the code are largely left to be worked out for a community on a more individual basis.

The service aspect is undoubtedly one of the *raisons d'etre* of religion. In a secular society, one has to follow at least a humanistic model and invent organizations like "scouts" or "peace-corps" etc. to motivate the young people.

Despite differences which are largely attributable to the social milieus in which the various religions arose and operated, there are basic similarities in all codes of conduct of various religions.

The universal yearning in the human heart for understanding the nature of consciousness, life and death form the second *raison d'etre* for religion. The questions concerning these are at once theoretical and practical. The practical aspect deals with the universal feeling of inadequacy in life. This includes:

1. *Fears about diseases, old age, and death:* It is recorded in Buddha's life how these fears stirred his soul to look for deeper

truths. A similar experience is narrated in the life of Ramana Maharshi. Actually all of us encounter these fears, and they turn us to look for the deeper truths of Religion.

2. Tensions in daily life, dilemmas about the choice of action in life: One is forced to play various roles in life. To play them competently, and yet developing a certain detachment and witness-consciousness towards them is an art. Avoiding petty talk, finding divinity in forgiveness — towards others including our "enemies", and equally importantly, towards oneself — are some of the profound accomplishments in religious life.

3. Pursuit of happiness: One tries to find happiness in material attainments. But there is a "law of diminishing returns", which is a starting point of the science of Economics. Also governments are instituted among men to ensure facility for an individual in his or her pursuit of happiness. There are partial truths in these economic and political solutions. But it is only Religion which has dealt with these problems at depth.

In the religion developed in India, Vedanta has provided a theoretical basis of dealing with the problem of the universal feeling of inadequacy in life, and Yoga has provided an experimental, experiential side to this theory. I would like to know their parallels in Christianity and Islam. Among the philosophical writings in Europe, it seems that Spinoza comes closest to Vedantic thought. St. Augustine and Aquinas tried to combine the Greek thought with Christianity. Have there been any similar attempts to combine Vedanta and Yoga with Christianity?

William James, and Jung have mentioned the universality of "numinous experiences". In some of the Masses in the Church which I have attended, I have heard people talking about "the holy ghost touching me"-experiences, which they usually attribute to the compassion of Jesus Christ. In other traditions they describe similar experiences but attribute them to other prophets or gurus. It is fairly clear that all of these are various levels of *Yogic* experiences. It is the authenticity of these experiences which is the ultimate proof of the validity of Religion on an individual basis. Various codes of ethics, and codes of conduct are essentially the means to attaining this experience.

Most religions provide certain belief-systems about what happens after death. Death is a profound riddle in life. Each belief-system provides a profound sense of security in life, but its validity cannot be argued strictly on a rational basis.

There appear to be mainly two such systems: 1) Last Judgment Day: One is born only once and one dies only once. After death one waits until the "last day" when according to

your merits you will go to heaven or hell. 2) Rebirth: Only body dies, but not soul. If the soul has unfinished "vasanas" it will get another body to exhaust them. When no vasanas are left, the individual soul merges into the cosmic soul.

The notion of the last judgment day probably originated with the Jewish religion, and it is shared by both Christianity and Islam. The ideas of heaven and hell however are more universal. In the Hindu conceptualization they occur in the Puranas, and the descriptions there are not very different from those in the Bible or Koran. But in the Hindu view, heaven and hell are not considered as permanent states for a being.

In turn, a belief-system may entail certain social practices. If we believe in the last judgment day, then cremation of dead bodies would make us shudder in horror, and burial or at least preservation of bones becomes a natural custom. — This custom has led to an amusing practical problem in Jerusalem, namely it is often difficult to build new homes or roads in the old city, for one is likely to find bones at unexpected places when one begins to dig! — If we start with the belief that one's essence is *not* the body, and it is the body that dies and not that essence, then no special significance is attached to preservation of the bodily remains. As you may recall, it was an explicit wish of Pandit Nehru that his body be cremated and the ashes be scattered over the fields of India!

Finally, most religions invoke belief in "God". The Jewish G-d who describes himself as "I am that I am" is probably the same as the Upanishadic "Brahman". I do not know why the Jewish G-d is a male. He certainly does not have a wife. I wonder whether the original language in which the Old Testament was written, G-d had a neuter gender. In the New Testament the G-d becomes the God and begets a son by his own power.

"God", howsoever one wishes to explain it, is certainly a yogic experience, and it occurs at various levels. Jesus is surely referring to this experience when he is talking about "the Kingdom of God is within you". A relationship of God and Man is just a level of this experience, and it can range from pure monism to pure dualism.

I gather from your reference to Ramanuja that you have probably dealt with this topic in depth already in your thesis. I shall very much appreciate your comments on this topic.

As I said earlier, I strongly feel that the people of Indian origin following the Hindu and Christian traditions should start a comprehensive dialogue to arrive at an understanding of what Religion is about, and they could do this by comparing their respective traditions. You must have noticed that I have been

careful not to use the word "Hinduism". As you surely know, the word "Hindu" does not occur in the Vedas, or Upanishads, or Gita. The word "Hinduism" was probably introduced in a pejorative sense in the days of Muslim or British imperial domination of India. In the early editions of the Oxford-Cambridge dictionaries, the explanations of "Hinduism" were simply atrocious. Hindus, at their best, describe their religion as "Sanatana Dharma". This "Sanatana Dharma" seems to come very close in conception to "Christianity" which Christ was trying to articulate. We need to emphasise this basic conceptual unity, and avoid further theological categorizations which have proved to be divisive in the past.

In closing I would like to request you: 1) to comment on the definition of Religion as proposed by me; 2) to comment on the place of Vedanta and Yoga in Religion, their high points as well as inadequacies; 3) to comment on the feasibility of bringing together the Hindu and Christian traditions.

I am quite aware that there will be resistance to find the basic conceptual unity in Sanatana Dharma and Christianity from some influential quarters of both the Hindus and the Christians. But I am optimistic about the power of communication. If most doctors start telling that cigarette-smoking is bad, it does make an effect in a few generations. This effect is based on understanding, and so it is more permanent. For this, of course, the doctors need to have those guts and honesty, even if their research is funded by the tobacco companies !

With warm personal regards,

Queen's College,
New York

Sincerely,
R. S. Kulkarni

Response to Dr. Ravi S. Kulkarni

Dear Dr. Kulkarni,

Thank you very much for the careful attention you paid to my talk on July 18, and the trouble you took to formulate your thoughts on it and call the attention of our Indian Academics in America to the important issues of religious diversity and multiculturism. This gives me an opportunity to clarify several points, which I shall list below.

1. *Interrelationship of Religions.* First of all I am not "advocating a sort of universally acceptable religion". In fact there have been several attempts in the past to create such an universal religion, and those attempts failed. Religions are doctrinally so diverse that it will be almost impossible to bring them all into some common theoretical framework. One reason is that different religions have adopted radically different philosophies, which view the same facts from different angles. The emergence of great many new religious movements even within the same religion has further complicated the matter. What can actually be done is to note their convergence in praxis in the ultimate concerns of man today. They all give answers to the existential questions regarding human life, origin of human beings, meaning of earthly existence, meaning of suffering, life after death, reward and punishment for human actions and the like. From this common agreement regarding what is right or wrong, true or false, good or bad, we can devise strategies for an ongoing dialogue to clarify the doctrinal principles of each religion both to its members as well as to people of other faiths.

I fully agree with you that "we do not wish to merely list the similarities and contrasts between the Hindu Religion and Christianity, and end up with advocating tolerance of different traditions". Worse still is the proposal brought by an American-British group to Bangalore recently at the international seminar to mark the centenary of the World Parliament of Religions: A draft circulated at the meeting, advocated the proclamation of a "Global Ethic" comprising "a set of core values found in the teachings of the religions" as "an irrevocable, unconditional norm for all areas of life, for families and communities, for races, nations and religions". The group appeared rather allergic to the word 'religion' and wanted only an "ethic" comprising the core teachings of different religions. We, the participants from India, Hindus and Christians alike, objected to the whole idea of one group, some of them adhering to no religious tradition, sitting in judgement over all religions and deciding what is essential and what is non-essential. Besides, what happens to those elements of a particular faith judged non-essential? Since religious faith is a total commitment, no

religious person will like some parts of his faith judged as non-essential. This attempt also contradicted the basic principle of comparative religion that any ethical concept of a religion should be viewed in the context of its total world vision, with the specific religious meaning of the concept, and also in relation to the cluster of concepts and principles that together form a special religious theme.

2. *How do we communicate religious Experience?* Surely our experience, especially religious experience, is multi-dimensional while our communication has to be necessarily linear. So naturally there is no direct communication of religious experience itself. All that a man of authentic religious experience is supposed to "do" is to help another to attain the same experience by himself. So all religious communication is symbolic: the experiencer translates his incommunicable experience into words and gestures to point towards the ineffable reality of which he got a glimpse. The recipient of the communication has to detach the symbol from the personal framework of the communicator and reincarnate it in his own personal psyche to achieve the same experience.

The approach, therefore, to start interreligious dialogue is not the definition of terms like 'religion' and 'morality'. It will be reductionistic to put radically different religions and moral systems into the straight jacket of a preconceived definition. We will have to start with the widest understanding of religion as that which honest "religious" people claim to be engaged in. The Ten Commandments of the Bible, the Eightfold Way of Buddhism, and the Yamaṇiyama of Patanjali Yoga cannot be composed into a good system "for humanity transcending sect, place, and time", as you suggest, without doing violence to their original context of the Biblical religion, Buddhism and the Yoga system, and also in a way distorting these exerpts taking them out of the total world vision to which they naturally belong. We should not be misled by superficial similarities in theoretical field, since the ideas themselves are integral parts of radically different philosophies. We cannot take for granted a global ideology or a single unified religion beoynd all existing religions, and certainly not the domination of one religion over all others.

What we can confidently start from is a fundamental consensus among religious people on actual praxis, the binding moral rules that form irrevocable standards generally recognized by all, though there may be differences in the application of those norms in obscure and difficult situations. The starting point for interreligious communication may be a common spirituality to which each religion may make a certain specific contribution without denying the validity of other systems. Here the practical application of the Ten Commandments and the universal psychology of the Yoga and the like, without challenging their theoretical

suppositions and justifications, may help to bring out the common spirituality shared naturally by all human beings. After all, the elaborate religious systems came up only later to explain and justify the practice already in place.

One radical difficulty with traditional religious philosophies of both East and West is that, though they start with everyday experience, they immediately escape into an absolutist metaphysical world, on the foundation of which they pretend to relativize all concrete experience. Thus Sri Sankaracharya sees our practical world as really unreal and Brahman alone as the One-alone-without-a-second. Then all discussion of this transcendental reality has very little relevance for our life which is already judged unreal. Sri Ramanuja, on the other hand, with his bhakti tradition, gives a lasting reality to the relatively unreal world and human souls as the body and attributes of the Lord. The whole discussion then is from the part of the human soul held in bondage in this world of ignorance and suffering and the means for attaining its lasting liberation, a practical concern.

Western theologians also fell into the same trap by focusing attention on God, His attributes, and His act of creation and His redemptive plan for human beings. Thomas Aquinas recognized the fallacy of this procedure and stated that theology has its focus not in God, whom we cannot comprehend, but in the emergence of creatures from the Creator and their final return to him through their proper activities. Even modern theologians like Karl Rahner, Bernard Lonergan and Walter Kasper commit the same old mistake on account of their concern to undergird their analysis of human life and its practical concerns with a reference to absolute metaphysical principles for justification, and secure the possibility of the integral and continuous transmission of their doctrinal statements. But, as Derrida and the deconstructionists have succeeded in showing, our world shot through and through with aspects such as absence, alterity, rapture and breach cannot allow any shred of essence to remain untouched. So Aristotle in the 6th book of his *Nicomachean Ethics* advocated the importance of *phronesis* or practical reason in man's moral life. For practical reason is "concerned with reason and with knowledge, not detached from a being that is becoming, but determined by it and determinative of it" (6.1141 b 8-11). Man is a historical being, and his radical historicity means that in moral and religious matters practical reason actually means "deliberating well" in contingent circumstances. So I fully agree with you when you say: "Despite differences, which are largely attributable to the social milieus in which the various religions arose and operated, there are basic similarities in all codes of conduct of various religions. The universal yearning in the human heart for understanding

the nature of consciousness, life and death forms the second *raison d'être* for religion."

But this community of expression is not restricted to ethical codes alone, nor to similarity of response to fears and tensions in daily life and failures in the pursuit of happiness. Human rationality is exercised within radically contingent circumstances, and hence religious expressions such as rituals and festivals and other cultural expressions of religions in the same place may have a certain similarity. Peter Winch, however, influenced by Wittgenstein, claimed that there existed a-priori structures on the societal and cultural level which constituted regulative forms of life for members of particular communities, and that these could be interpreted only within their frameworks and not by any outside rules. But others like Kai Nielson have argued against such watertight compartmentalization of cultural expressions, since one must be able to distinguish incoherency from coherency, unintelligibility from intelligibility and the like.

3. *Doctrinal Justification of Religions.* But the same basic unity cannot be postulated among religions when they relate their praxis to the total reality of human life and present belief systems. To put together the Christian and Islamic ideas of Last Judgement with the Hindu and Buddhist conceptions of rebirth and reincarnation, or belief in God of the Bible and the Brahman of the Upanishads and similar apparently parallel ideas in religions will be an over-simplification of the divergent processes by which different religions arrive at their belief systems. Here it is rather the question of the unique approach a particular faith is adopting in order to explain its praxis and make it relevant to the different coordinates of human existence. Belief systems make religious praxis belong to a wider framework of life and intelligible and relevant in that broader context.

Thus Christianity refers its religious praxis to history, to the particular events relating to Jesus Christ, his life, teaching, suffering, death and resurrection. So Christian faith is not a metaphysics, but "news" that something has happened in Jesus of history, which radically changed the religious landscape for all human beings into something better than what was before. So Christian belief system is called Gospel or Good News. For Muslims the belief system is constituted by the revelation of the Qur'an to Muhammed. God's eternal law is being made present to human beings. The Buddhist belief system refers to the Three Jewels, the illumination of Buddha, the dharma of the Four Noble Truths, and the Samgha that indicates the different stages by which an individual moves towards liberation. The Hindu belief system mostly refers to the transcendental dimension of human existence, how the finite and transitory relate to the eternal and

immutable reality of Brahman. In fact these many, radically different belief systems may be looked upon as different paradigms for the faith experience of people. They all are not saying the same thing, nor do they all explain in the same way the content of religious faith. History, psychology, law and metaphysics are all different coordinates of human experience, and systems which emphasize one or other of these coordinates may not explain all the aspects equally. Each system, while remaining consistent with its own focus has at the same time to do justice to dimensions emphasized by others. Like Quantum theory and Newtonian physics in science, different paradigms may attempt to explain the same facts. The new paradigm has to be judged by the old paradigm, but one replaces the other because it gives intelligibility to more facts and more details. So each belief system has to be self-critical to find whether its model satisfies all the data of faith, and it has to render the same service of sympathetic criticism to other religions as well, to bring out those dimensions that have been left in obscurity.

4. *Approach to Ultimate Existential Questions.* The simple fact is that the specific approach and language of a particular belief system should not be employed to judge the conclusions of another belief system. Thus concerning the profound riddle of life expressed by the Judeo-Christian and Islamic traditions in terms of death, judgment, heaven or hell it is intelligible only in an historical approach. According to it, human life that begins in the womb, with the reality of the spiritual human soul explainable only in reference to the creative act of God, attains its full growth in this life itself and attains its final and eternal state in death. But Hinduism which conceives human life as a series of concentric circles or sheathes around the Atman, the Self of one's self, cannot think of a heaven or hell, but only of an individual self being stuck on one of the outer rings, like the self of food-*annamayātman* or self of feeling-*manomayatman* and going round and round from death to birth and from birth to death. The real critical question is the internal consistency of these explanations and their adequacy to explain human responsibility and the effective sanctions for human behaviour.

Similarly the concept the divine reality has to be judged by the specific paradigm applied to the problem of God. For Hebrews wandering through the desert Yahweh was the Lord of heaven who entered with them a kind of contract modelled on liberal agreements established by the Middle East monarchs with people they conquered. The real meaning of 'Yehyeh aser yehyeh', generally translated as "I am that I am" is "I am who I will be", that means I shall be faithful to the covenant I made with you. The Hindu description of Atman/Brahman comes from a yogic experience of the immanent Inner Self identical with

the transcendent absolute Existence. The Christian idea of the Trinity of God came from the actual testimony of Jesus who spoke about the Father, about himself as the Son sent by the Father, and the Spirit, another advocate whom he was to send on the disciples. This Trinity of persons was understood without any denial of the earlier strict monotheism, with the concept of person as a category beyond that of essence: the one immutable and indivisible divine essence identifies with itself three distinct "persons". Augustine explained it with the analogy of the human mind: The infinite intelligence that is God knowing himself terminates in a Word which has to be equal to God and also identical with God. This procession of the Word is a generation, but cannot have any of the imperfections of human generation such as dependence on another person, and the separation of the child from the parent. Similarly the Spirit is the love of the Father and the Son, and as the divine self-gift has to be equal to and identical with God in essence, though distinct in subsistence. This goes to show that the faith system of one religion cannot be explained by the theological paradigm of another religion.

There may, however, be analogies that may help to build bridges among different belief systems. Experience of the Holy Spirit as the indwelling divine presence in all hearts may have a good analogy with the yogic experience of the Atman. The Advaitic analysis of Sat-Cit-Ananda or satyam-jnanam-anantam may have a great similarity with the Christian understanding of the Trinity. As Sri Sankaracharya explains in his bhashya on the Taittiriya Upanishad satyam, jnanam and anantam are not three attributes of the One-without-a-second, nor three aspects or functions, nor even three synonyms. The three are distinct, still identical with Brahman. This is analogous to the Christian effort to see three "persons" as pure originless paternity, pure sonship and the pure outpouring of love, all identical with the one God.

This approach among the radically different belief systems of major religions calls for a serious and ongoing dialogue among committed followers of these religions, who are fully convinced of their own traditions, and yet united with people of other faiths in a common moral praxis and spirituality. This common search, after all, is to critically examine their own paradigm for spirituality as well as those of others and to arrive at the best paradigm to explain all its relevant facts.

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